

## Orson Bennett Adams

Orson Bennett Adams was born 9 March 1815 in New York. He was one of over a dozen children of Elisha Bennett Adams and Asenath Lucy Camp. The family moved to Brown, Illinois, about 1827. Orson, his brother Joel, sister Sally, mother and stepfather Dr. Priddy Meeks, all took land adjacent to each other there.<sup>1</sup> Orson was an engineer.

Orson married Susannah "Susan" Smith in 1836 in Morgan, Illinois<sup>2</sup>, and they moved to Schyler, Illinois. They had three daughters and an adopted son. The family was living in Brown, Illinois, on the 1840 census<sup>3</sup>, and this was the year the family joined the Mormon Church. They moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, where Orson helped build the Mormon temple. In 1844, Orson and Susan, who had lost two babies, were given a baby boy whose mother had died, who they adopted and raised.<sup>4</sup> There was a bit of a family scandal in 1846 when Susan's stepfather forged Orson's name on a land deed and tried to pass it off to Orson's brother Elisha.<sup>5</sup>

Orson and his family were one of the first to cross the Missouri River when the Mormon exodus started. When volunteers were asked to join the Mormon Battalion to fight in the Mexican War, Orson was the second man who volunteered to go.<sup>6</sup> He enlisted in the US Army 16 July 1846 at Council Bluffs, Iowa.<sup>7</sup> Susan also went<sup>8</sup> as a laundress and nurse (she had been raised in the home of a doctor). Their little boy was left with his grandparents to continue crossing the plains to the Salt Lake Valley.

Orson became a sergeant of the Sick Detachment of Company C, under Captain James Brown.<sup>9</sup> Three sick detachments of disabled men, along with some women and children, spent the winter of 1846-1847 at Pueblo, Colorado. Then 214 of them, in company with some Saints from Mississippi, departed 24 May 1847 and arrived in the valley 29 July 1847. They were only five days behind Brigham Young and his original group.<sup>10</sup> Orson was discharged from 16 December 1847.<sup>11</sup> He later received an Army pension.<sup>12</sup>

Orson built a home on Mill Creek, Salt Lake, Utah Territory. In the second summer of the settlement the crickets came and food was scarce. The soldiers' wages were almost exhausted. He spent \$50 for 100 pounds of flour and 100 pounds of "shorts".<sup>13</sup> Shorts is a very coarsely ground wheat bran, sometimes known as unbolted flour. It needed to be sifted to remove impurities.

One morning Orson came in and announced to his wife his determination to go to the States for supplies. He asked for enough food for his first lunch, and trusted his gun kind providence for the rest of the trip. It may have been on the trip back that Orson crossed the plains again with the Samuel Gully and Orson Spencer Company in May 1849, with a wagon and four oxen. He was listed as the "captain of the first ten", or being in charge of ten families. His group included fourteen wagons, thirty-

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<sup>1</sup> *Familysearch.org*

<sup>2</sup> Illinois Marriages to 1850; Illinois Marriages, 1790-1860; Illinois, Marriage Index, 1860-1920.

<sup>3</sup> United States Census, 1840.

<sup>4</sup> Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

<sup>5</sup> Illinois Miscellaneous Court Records, 1825-1858.

<sup>6</sup> From Kirtland to Salt Lake City, by James A. Little, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Utah, Veterans with Federal Service Buried in Utah, Territorial to 1966.

<sup>8</sup> The Life, Times and Family of Orson Pratt Brown.

<sup>9</sup> History of Utah, by Orson F. Whitney, Vol 1, p. 255.

<sup>10</sup> Utah Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Database.

<sup>11</sup> US Headstone Applications for Military Veterans, 1925-1963.

<sup>12</sup> United States Mormon Battalion Pension Applications.

<sup>13</sup> Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

five souls, two horses, five mules, fifty-four oxen, twenty-one cows, two loose cattle, twenty sheep, one pig, two ducks, three dogs, and five doves.<sup>14</sup> He also served as a commissary for the fourth 50, to agree on terms, prices, and to purchase corn fodder, provisions, and other articles as needed.<sup>15</sup>

While Orson was away on his trip, Chief Walker and some of his Indian braves had taken too much "fire water" and were tearing around the Mill Creek homestead. His wife Susan sat in the door of her home all day with a gun across her knees and her children in the room behind her (they had taken in two orphaned children).<sup>16</sup>

When the express came that fall, it brought a message from Orson that she could expect him home if his team would hold out. The time came and passed, so Susan had a team of oxen yoked to a wagon and with their 14-year old son, she started to go to his relief<sup>17</sup> (September 1849).<sup>18</sup> They were unable to manage the animals, so they never unyoked them from the wagon, and for two nights the animals slept in their traces. At the end of their third day, they met Orson and his exhausted team.<sup>19</sup>

In 1850, the family was living in Iron County, Utah Territory, where Orson was an engineer.<sup>20</sup> In the winter of 1851, Orson took his family, their cattle and goods in response to call to settle on Little Salt Lake, a colony known as Parowan.<sup>21</sup> On the way from Beaver they had to cross a ledge where the wagons and an old brass cannon had to be lowered with ropes. The first two companies made it over the cliff and went on to make camp. The third company was still laboring over the ledge. Late in the evening, the first two camps were roused by a volley from the cannon and several rapid rifle shots. To the startled colonists it could mean but one thing -- Indians. They rushed out into the snow and found Company Three celebrating the safe descent from the ledge and the arrival into the valley.<sup>22</sup>

They camped on the south side of the river until a fort was built. After a short time at the fort, the Adams family moved to Red Creek and took up a homestead. "Times were hard in those first years at Parowan" said son John Adams. "The beaver built dams in the creek and shut off the water supply. The men would go in the day and clear them out and in the night the beaver would put them in again. The wheat was beginning to head but it was burning. The people held a meeting and prayed for relief. That night it snowed about twelve inches. The people were disheartened. They had water but the wheat all lay flat. During the day the sun came out and melted the snow. The wheat straightened up and they had a good crop."

On the 1856 territorial census, the family was living in Paragonah, Iron, Utah Territory.<sup>23</sup> Orson ran a sawmill, and had an accident which cut off three of his fingers of his left hand. He served a mission to the Spring Valley in the White Mountains of Nevada. There were many problems with the Indians there. After two years, he returned to Parowan worn out and discouraged. His report induced the authorities to give up the mission.<sup>24</sup>

In 1859, Orson married Charlotte Elizabeth Gingell in the home of his wife's stepfather, Priddy Meeks. This home was used as an endowment house before the St George Temple was built. Orson and

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Gully/Orson Spencer Company, 1849 Trail Journal; Journal of Reuben Miller: Emigrating to Utah 1849.

<sup>15</sup> William Clayton's Journal, 1921, p. 10; Journeys in the Wilderness, in Historical Record, Vol. 8, p. 885.

<sup>16</sup> Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel 1847-1868.

<sup>19</sup> Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

<sup>20</sup> United States Census, 1850.

<sup>21</sup> Saga of Three Towns, by Marietta M Mariger, 1951, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

<sup>23</sup> Utah Territorial Census, 1856.

<sup>24</sup> Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

Charlotte had two children, then she left him and remarried in Wyoming. He may have had up to five additional wives in polygamy, but no additional children are known.<sup>25</sup>

In 1860, Orson and his family were farming in Red Creek, Iron, Utah Territory.<sup>26</sup> In 1861, Orson was called to settle at the confluence of Leeds and Quail Creeks. Nine families built the new settlement called Harrisburg. A small sandstone masonry house was built in 1863 for the family, and it is still standing. The family lived in this house until the early 1890s.<sup>27</sup>

When the Blackhawk war broke out in 1865, there was a raid on Parowan. The settlers there sent a telegram to John, asking him to come to their aid in defending the stock. They built a look-out tower thirty feet high on Little Creek. There he with three others stayed as a picket guard. One man was always on the tower watching; the other men carried reports to the town daily.<sup>28</sup>

In 1869, Orson became presiding elder of Harrisburg (what would now be known as bishop).<sup>29</sup> During the winter of 1870, John Kemple stayed with their family<sup>30</sup> and made the famous initial discovery of silver in the surrounding reefs. Orson was one of those who filed a mining claim under the Union Mining District formed by John Kemple. When the district was reorganized in 1874, Orson was the president of the new Harrisburg Mining District (which encompassed 144 square miles with the schoolhouse at its center).<sup>31</sup>

In 1874, Orson was made treasurer of the Leeds Ward United Order.<sup>32</sup> He then served again as presiding elder from 1876 to 1891 when meetings in Harrisburg were discontinued and people then attended meetings in Leeds.<sup>33</sup> On the 1880 census, Orson and his wife were living with two granddaughters.<sup>34</sup> In 1889, Orson was made bishop of the Harrisburg Ward.<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to note that Orson's name showed on a list of bishops in the St George Stake in the newspaper almost weekly through 1890.<sup>36</sup>

Susan died in 1892, and Orson soon moved to his daughter's home in Leeds. He is living with them on the 1900 census.<sup>37</sup> He died 4 February 1901 in Leeds, and is buried there.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Familysearch.org*

<sup>26</sup> United States Census, 1860.

<sup>27</sup> Orson Adams House and Harrisburg Utah.

<sup>28</sup> Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

<sup>29</sup> *Saga of Three Towns*, by Marietta M Mariger, 1951, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> United States Census, 1870.

<sup>31</sup> *From the Ground Up: The History of Mining in Utah*, 2006, p. 257-258.

<sup>32</sup> *Saga of Three Towns*, by Marietta M Mariger, 1951, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> United States Census, 1880.

<sup>35</sup> *Deseret Evening News*, 7 December 1889.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, various issues throughout 1890.

<sup>37</sup> United States Census, 1900.

<sup>38</sup> Utah, Veterans with Federal Service Buried in Utah, Territorial to 1966.



Tombstone of Orson Bennett Adams  
(Image from *Findagrave.com*)