

Life History of William Carter

William Carter was born in the little village of Ledbury, Hereford, England, February 12, 1821. His father Thomas Carter, was the son of Thomas and Elizabeth Carter and was born at Feckenham, Redditch, Worcestershire, England, and later moved to Ledbury, where he married Sarah Parker in 1810.

Ledbury is nestled among the beautiful beautiful green rolling hills of that English Countryside, and in its center is a lovely little church and spire, which seem to set off the town to great advantage. It was in this little church that Thomas and Sarah were married, where they attended services every week, and where all of their children's births, deaths, and marriages were recorded as long as they lived there.

William was the sixth child in the family. He had two brothers and four sisters. We know nothing of his childhood days but he learned Black Smithing and was working at it when he was 19 years old.

One morning while he was working in his shop, early in the fall of 1840, he and the other men working with him, heard some beautiful singing. They went outside to see if they could find where it was coming from. After inquiring a bit and looking around with all the other curious people, they discovered that it was coming from the tree tops above but they could see nothing. This singing was the most beautiful they had ever listened to, and it continued throughout the day. William said it gave them the most happy, peaceful feeling and they knew it was a heavenly choir singing. Several times during the morning and the afternoon they went out to look into the heavens to see if they could see anything, but they could see nothing. That night when William was going home from work, he met two elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, who invited him to attend a meeting that they were holding that night. William went and took his mother and several other members of the family, who were home. After the first sermon was preached William was converted, so at the close of the meeting William went up and asked to be baptized. The elders said, "Young man wait until you learn more about it." But William replied, "If I should wait a year I would not be any more ready than I am now, for I know that you have the true church."

William's mother did not feel as he did. She was very bitter against the "Mormons" and forbade him to attend any more of their meetings. However, despite all of this, he continued to attend their services, but in secret, and on the 27th of December, 1840 he went to Castle Frome and was baptized by Edward Ockey, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. (This possibly took place at the pond at the back of

John Benbow's home, as he lived at Hill Farm, Castle Frome, Ledbury, Hereford, England.

This was all done in secret. His mother had not the slightest idea of what he had done. It seems his father was dead, as he never mentioned him. William had a sister, Elizabeth who was married to Charles Thomas and living at Stanley Hill, a place a few miles away. They had four children and had joined the church and were making plans to go to America. When her mother heard this she was very much upset and tried to change her daughter's mind, but to no avail. Then the mother asked for Eliza, Elizabeth's oldest child, to come and visit her a spell before they left. The mother was very much attached to this granddaughter, and as soon as she got her she determined to keep her. In vain Elizabeth tried to get Eliza back without causing trouble; but the mother stood fast. William was also making plans to go to America, but in secret, and on the same boat as his sister and husband and family. So between he and Elizabeth, they made their plans to get Eliza away from their mother, and to the boat in time. William was quite attached to Eliza too, and they were great friends. She was 10 years old and becoming homesick to see her folks, and asked many times when she was to go home, but her grandmother would always put her off. Finally the night before they were to leave, William told Eliza of their plan to steal away in the night, and what they were to do and that she must be very careful when he awakened her the next morning so they would disturb no one.

The next morning at 3 AM William awakened here and together they prepared to leave. They stole from the house without awakening anyone. That was the last he saw of his home or his mother, brothers, and the rest of his sisters. He and Eliza walked all the way to Bristol. In one of the towns he passed through he saw Queen Victoria for the first time. She was on one of her Royal Tours through the country. He thought she was very beautiful. At Bristol the boat was there ready to sail, with a few of the saints on board including his sister, Elizabeth, and her husband and family. They were very happy and relieved to see them.

They set sail on 11 April 1841 from Bristol and landed at Quebec. Here they took a boat and traveled through the Great Lakes to Chicago. From here they journeyed across land and down the Mississippi to Nauvoo. William had walked all the journey they had by land and his shoes had long since worn out. When they were just a few miles from Nauvoo, their destination, they heard someone shout, "Here comes the Prophet!" There was electricity throughout the little company. They drew up at the side of the road and waited. William looked at his bare feet and was ashamed of them, so he quickly stepped

off the road and hid them under a fallen log. The prophet dashed into view, riding his big black horse at full speed and came to a stop in front of them. What a joyous moment? This little band of saints had been traveling for three months and now was being greeted by their Prophet, a Prophet of God. And what a hearty greeting and welcome to Nauvoo they got, too. When the Prophet saw William he said, "Boy, what are you here for?" and William said promptly, "For the Gospel's sake." This was the 11th July, 1841.

A few days after this William started work on the Nauvoo House and later on on the Nauvoo Temple. He became acquainted with the Prophet and his brother Hyrum, and loved them very much. He bought a little farm a short distance from Nauvoo and built a house on it. It happened that the Grist Mill where he took his grain to be ground was owned by John Benbow, the man spoken of by Wilfred Woodruff where the United Brethren met at his home back in England, and who lived but a few miles from Ledbury. He had a niece living with him by the name of Ellen Benbow. William fell in love with her and married her on the 5 December, 1843.

The following June the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were martyred and William took an active part in protecting and burying their bodies.

In 1846, when most of the Saints left Nauvoo due to persecution, William and his wife were among them that went on to Council Bluffs and then later to Winter Quarters. The next year he was one of those chosen and selected to make that first trek out to the Great Salt Lake Valley, in that Pioneer Company. William, with these first pioneers, made his preparations for the trip and traveled to Elkhorn, the base camp which was 19 miles from Winter Quarters. There were 73 wagons, 143 men, 3 women and 2 children, 148 souls in all. While here Brigham Young and several of the others including William, returned to Winter Quarters. On going to his home, William found his wife very sick and not expected to live. William was upset and hurried to Brigham Young to see what he should do. Brigham Young said, "Go on to the Valley Bro. Carter, and I promise you in the name of the Lord, that your wife will recover and follow you out." William had great faith in Brigham Young. (He and his wife were present at that memorable meeting, when the mantle of the Prophet fell on Brigham's shoulders, and Brigham's voice sounded like that of the Prophet's and his face shone and looked like the Prophet Joseph Smith. To this day they have both testified many times.) This promise to William was verily fulfilled; for William went on with the Pioneers, his wife recovered and followed him out later with a company that arrived that same Fall, she driving her own ox-team across the plains. She lived to the age of 75.

William took Brigham Young's advice, and his wagon was third in line all across the plains. He said he carried a precious burden, which was kept a secret from everyone else except a few.

When they reached the Great Salt Lake Valley, the 7 scouts on horseback entered it first on the 21 of July. Brigham Young then ordered the advance company to enter the valley on the 22. William was among this group. On the morning of the 23, William plowed the first half acre in the valley. This is what he says in his own words, "On July 23, 1847, I put my plow on the south side of the Thirteenth Ward and Levi Kendall and Bishop Taft put their plow in and broke the beam, this was close to camp, and they could not plow. I plowed about a half acre before any other teams came. This took place about noon. The next morning on the 24th of July we planted potatoes, and about noon Brigham Young and the remainder of the company rolled into camp."

The ground had been so hard and dry they had to irrigate the land from a little stream of water before they could plant. This land that William plowed is where the Centre Theatre now stands, and there is a bronze plaque on the door telling about the incident.

In the Fall, William's wife joined him and they became established in the valley of the Great Salt Lake. When the ground was broken for the Temple, there was such a crowd of people there where the leaders were ready to shovel the first dirt, that William and his friend ran around to the North East corner so they could have a chance to be some of the first to shovel the dirt for the Temple foundation. He worked on the temple from then on until he moved away.

In 1848 the grasshopper plague came. William was determined they they should not destroy his crop. He plowed a ditch around his lot or field and ran water in it. Then with the help of his wife and a hired man, they drove the pests into the water. Great flocks of them were herded into this ditch, and then with a wheat riddle they scooped them up and buried them in holes. Some of his neighbors watching on, said it was useless, but he continued his method and was able to raise 100 bushels or wheat, while some of his neighbors raised nothing.

In 1852 his first child, John, was born. In the Fall of the next year he married Harriet Temperance Utey. When William went to ask Brigham Young if he could take another wife, (a man had to prove himself worthy to have more than one wife, financially and religiously) he was afraid to ask, but Brigham Young looked at him and read his

thoughts, so he said, "Yes brother Carter, go and marry her and the Lord will bless you." In 1857 he took a third wife, Sophronia Turnbow. This same year he was called to go on a mission to Eastern Canada. There were 70 Elders called and they were all to take handcarts and cross over the plains that way to Winter Quarters. William had to make many sacrifices to do this. He had to sell a big mare and a colt to get the means to make a handcart. From Church Chronology we read: "On Thursday, 23 of April, 1857, a company consisting of about 70 missionaries, bound for Europe and other parts of the world, left Great Salt Lake City with handcarts. They arrived at Florence, Nebraska on June 10, 1857 making the trip to the Missouri River in 40 ½ traveling days. They rested 7 1/2 days."

William in telling of the hardships they had in making this trip across the plains, related how at one time he got sick on buffalo meat and had a severe case of the dysentery. He became so weak and exhausted that when they came to a fresh stream of water, he begged them to go on and leave him. There was a little green grass growing by the stream and he thought just to lie ther and die was all he wanted. They all went on but a Brother Robert Gardner, who remained to look after him, however, William did not know this. He just laid there on the grass with his eyes shut and the longer he lay the stronger and better he became. New energy surged through his body. When he attempted to rise he noticed that the rest of the company were almost out of sight. He thought to himself, "What am I doing here, I should be on with the others." As he struggled to get to his feet, his friend came out from his hiding place to help him. This was a happy surprise for William and gave him moral support, so together they went on.

While on his mission to Canada, he found the people very cold and indifferent, and almost wholly without charity. This impression stayed with him all his life and in later years when his daughter, Elizabeth, married Ephriam Harker, and went to Cardston, Canada, William was quite unhappy about it and was sure she would find no friends.

On May 28, 1857, the U.S. War Department issued an order for an army to be sent to Utah to put in a new Governor and to suppress a rebellion. Pres. Jame Buchanan acted thus on the evil and lying reports of two Federal Judges , and without any investigation.. This army was to assemble at Fort Leavenworth, and to march to Utah as soon as possible. There were 2500 men and General Johnston was their leader. All mail was stopped to Utah, and for some reason the U. S. Government conducted the campaign with great secrecy. It was practically a declaration of war against one of her dependent units, without investigation, or just cause-- a thing without a parallel in the annals of this country. Bancroft, the historian stated, "It is probable that no expedition was ever

dispatched by the United States, better equipped and provisioned than was the army of Utah.” Despite their attempt at secrecy, the Mormons got to hear about it, and Brigham Young was notified on the 24th of July, while they were holding a celebration in Big Cottonwood Canyon, commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Pioneers entering the Salt Lake Valley.

On account of this Brigham Young sent word for all the missionaries to hasten home the quickest way possible, and to notify all the Saints they came in contact with, to gather into the valley for protection. So they returned with teams to get home as soon as possible. There is one incident that William tells about on his trip home. One day as they were crossing the plains, they noticed a long black streak on the horizon, stretching in both directions farther than the eye could see. They watched it for a while and finally discovered that it was a herd of buffalo moving south in front of them. They were not stampeding but there was no escape for the company of returning saints, as they had to pass through this endless herd of buffalo. The missionaries stopped and had prayers and council. It was finally decided to attempt to go through the herd, being very careful not to excite them or do anything to cause a stampede. They traveled for three days before they got through this herd.

In Howard R. Briggs book “Westward America” I found the following which may give one a good idea of these herds in those days, “I was once leading my troops from the Platte River to the Republican River, in Southern Nebraska, when we came upon the largest buffalo herd I had ever encountered. We estimated that it was 12 miles across the black mass; its length we could not guess, for the herd stretched away to the Southward farther than the eye could reach. How to break through this moving blockade was a problem which became serious when we saw the buffaloes were threatening to trample down our supply trains”, and grain. “Early one morning in 1851 I stood on an eminence overlooking a valley; and from bluff to bluff on the North and South and up the valley to the West as far as the eye could reach-the broad valley was literally blackened by a compact mass of buffalo; and not only this the massive bluffs on both sides were overed by thousands and thousands that were still pouring down into the already crowded valley.. the living dark mass covered the ground completely as a carpet covers a floor. It looked as though not another buffalo could have found room to squeeze in and a man could have walked across the valley on their huddled backs, as on a floor. The herd was on the move and was many hours in passing.

As they neared Salt Lake they were on the lookout for this Utah Army headed by General Johnston, every mile they got closer the tracks of the army was fresher. Finally

the scouts spotted them camped in the Mountains, so this little band of missionaries went around the spur of the mountain, and avoided them, unnoticed. Just as they were drawing a breath of relief, thinking they were safe back on the main road again, they met the advance guard of the army. The officers shouted, "Halt", and then asked them where Johnston's Army was, they answered in a careless way, "Oh they are just back there camped for the night." Then the officers told them of a bad stream they had to cross and that they had better wait until morning when they were going to build a bridge. However, they replied, "We think we can ford it." But the officer told them they could not as they had been trying to find a ford. The officers returned to the river with this little band of men to see if they could cross. They soon found a ford, and when the first wagon was over, the captain in a careless way shouted, "Now boys unhook your horses and turn out and lets have supper." Johnston's guards were still standing on the opposite bank, and when they saw the preparations for the night, they returned to their own camp. As soon as the officers were out of sight, the captain shouted, "Quick boys, get your horses onto your wagons. We won't wait for supper." So they left, leaving their camp fires burning. When the army arrived at the river the next morning and found the little band had flown, they were very angry.

As the little band of men, weary and worn from their long journey, neared their loved ones at Salt Lake City, they were filled with joy for they had been away from home 14 months never hearing one word from any of them. They soon learned that all the women and children and most of the men had left their homes and gone down to Provo, just leaving enough men to burn the city if the army came to take it. But the Lord was merciful to them. (They had returned home 21 June 1858.) Through the good services of Thomas L. Kane and others the united States Government was persuaded to send peace commissioners to Utah. As a result, Johnston's Army was permitted to enter the valley, providing they came peaceably and camped no closer than with 40 miles of the city. The evil soldiers were very disappointed that they were denied the privilege of plundering, etc., for which they had hoped and talked about all along the way. This army marched through Salt Lake City, June 6, 1858, peaceably and camped at a place 40 miles from the city, called Camp Floyd. Here they stayed for about three years. General Johnston left about 1860 and later joined the South in the Civil War and was killed in a battle. The rest of the camp was not abandoned until 1861, when they went to join the Civil War.

On June 31, 1861 William was ordained a High Priest and at the same time was made a councilor to Bishop Hoagland. Later on in the year at the October Conference, Brigham Young called William together with many others to go to Southern Utah to settle.

William prepared to leave as soon as possible and took with him his third and last wife, Sophronia, who had one child, a little girl 2 ½ years old by the name of Adeline. They arrived at their destination in November of that year. Ellen and Harriet were left back in Salt Lake City with their six children. Ellen had John, age 9 and Marian, age 4. Harriet had 3 boys and a girl, Sam, age 7, Isabella, age 5, Willard 3 and Lafayette a babe 2 months old.

William plowed the first land in the St George Valley as well as in the Salt Lake Valley. Brigham Young had called these people to settle here in order to raise cotton. On Wednesday, December the 4th at a meeting of the Southern Utah settlers who had arrived from the North, it was decided upon the motion of Erastus Snow, an apostle, to build a city to be called St George. This is where William settled and remained the rest of his life.

William and Sophronia had the largest tent in the company. It was a Sibley tent, and on Christmas day she cooked a big dinner and invited a large crowd of people. They had a big celebration, played games, sang songs and had an enjoyable time.

That winter William and his wife made adobies and built a little house with a lean to. Then after the harvest he returned back to Salt Lake. While there he heard Brigham Young in conference say: “Now brethren, those of you who have been called to settle Southern Utah, don’t leave a calf tied up here, that you will have to run back every little while to see it. As a result of this, William sold out all of his property in the city, took his other two wives and families, and moved them down to St George. He had made his home in Salt Lake City for 14 years and was just getting a few of the comforts of life about him, such as a young orchard and many shade trees. Now he had to give this all up and start pioneer life all over again.

The saints in Washington County that year had raised over 100, 000 pounds of cotton, and one year William’s families raised and spun into cloth, cotton amounting to 100 yards of cloth and all the shirt and pants cloth they needed.

On November 9, 1871, ten years after they moved there, George A. Smith dedicated the spot for the temple at St George. Brigham Young and Truman O. Angel were the architects for the temple. William was put in as overseer of laying the foundation of the temple. Several springs of alkali water were discovered and threatened to ruin the foundation through their seepage. To alleviate this difficulty a power driver was improvised out of a cannon, used by Napoleon and then brought to America to be used

in the Mexican War and then given to some of the Mormon Battalion soldiers for pay from Sutter for work done at his mill at the time gold was discovered on his place. This cannon was taken across the desert to Salt Lake and then later when these settlers went to St. George, it was given to them as protection against the Indians, etc. It was filled with lead and surrounded with cottonwood bark, which was firmly fastened on by means of steel bands to prevent it from splitting; a frame and device for hoisting this thousand pound weight was constructed, and after all the mud and water was excavated from the place where the foundation was to be, hundreds of tons of volcanic rock was pounded into the earth with this device and so great was the momentum that the hammer would bounce three times before it came to rest. In this way a secure foundation was made possible. William Carter was put in charge of this device for pounding in solidly the foundation bottoms and for having the rock hauled. Brigham Young prophesied that not one life would be lost in the construction of the temple. No life was lost, although there were several accidents. One day the hammer came down and struck the rim of William's hat and cut it off. That was the nearest he came to getting hurt. In 1877 the temple was completed and dedicated. William was set apart as an ordinance worker, and served in this capacity for 13 years.

In the latter part of May 1888, William was arrested by the United States officers for unlawful co-habitation or polygamy and with others, was taken to Beaver City for trial. On the first day of June he entered the Utah State prison at Salt Lake, where he remained for six months. George Q. Cannon an apostle, was also serving a sentence at the same time for the same thing, but he had a year to serve as he was on of the church authorities.

While William was serving his sentence, the State of Utah awarded him the gold medal for plowing the first half acre of land in the Salt Lake Valley. A committee went out to the State prison and awarded him the medal and pinned it on him.. The first day of December he was released from prison and he returned home to his families in St. George. He lacked 2 months and 12 days of being 69 years old at this time. He never was the same man afterwards for his courage seemed crushed and he never again showed the same grit to do and dare and endure the trials of life like he had always done before.

William was strictly honest, he was cheerful, ambitious and resourceful. His enthusiasm and courage were undaunted. He was gifted in coping with the problems at hand. He never lacked for a solution for his difficulties, and this could be attributed to the fact that he had a strong determination and an unwavering faith. He was deeply rooted in the gospel and was not afraid of hard work.

To prove his implicit faith in God and his promises the following incident may be related: At supper one evening, in the early days at Dixie, his wife said (probably Ellen), "William, what we have on the table is every eatable thing we have in the house. There is not a speck of flour left or any potatoes." He seemed very unconcerned about this and replied, "I have never yet failed to do my duty asked by the Lord, and I am sure he will open up the way for us to get some food." A few minutes after, a rap came on the door and a neighbor entered and said, "Brother Carter, I believe you have some hay you can spare. I have some flour and potatoes I can trade for it." The bargain was soon made and after the neighbor had gone, Brother Carter said, "Now children, you can see how the Lord will not forget those who will try to do their duty." Full of rich joys were the hearts of that family as they knelt in prayer that night.

In the early days of St. George, William served as councilor to Bishop Robert Gardner and also as a member of the town council. This noble and faithful life was ended 28 June 1896 at the age of 75 years and 5 months. He had suffered for several years with a rupture, at this time it had protruded and in forcing it back the bowel had got kinked and a stoppage of the bowel was the result. The doctor did not know what was wrong with him, but the doctor gave him some very strong medicine to move his bowels. They did not move and William suffered untold agonies for three days and then died. The doctor thinking he must have some peculiar disease, the people thought it best not to bring his body into the meeting house at the time of his funeral, so his casket was set out under the trees while the services were held. He was buried in the St. George City Cemetery. A white headstone marks his grave with the following epitaph:

An amiable Father here lies at rest
As ever God with his image blessed.
The friend of man, the friend of truth
The friend of age, the guide of youth.