

John Bennion's Autobiographical Sketch

[In The Bennion Family of Utah Volume II version of this sketch, a couple of paragraphs were inadvertently omitted. They were later included in The Bennion Family of Utah Volume III, page 556. Those paragraphs are included below.]

John, son of John and Elizabeth Bennion, was born in the township of Moor, Parish of Hawarden, County of Flint, North Wales.

My grandfather's name was William; his father's name was John Bennion, who was said to be an opulent farmer in his time, but ill fortune attended him, and his substance wasted away. The last known of him, one day he went out of his house and was never seen or heard of after. My grandfather was then a boy of twelve or fourteen. He now went into the employ of farmers by the year for a livelihood until grown, when he married Elizabeth Ibel. He labored by the day the remainder of his life while his health permitted; was an honest, hard-working man and out of his small earnings saved enough to support him in his old age when feeble.

My grandmother died about 1824. My first days at school I remember dinnering at her house at noontime. My grandfather lived with his children the remainder of his days. His last home was at Shotton, Hawarden Parish, with his daughter Elizabeth Jones, where he died in peace in his eightieth year. He was buried in the same grave with his wife. I attended his burial. At evening his children met, five in number, and after settling up all funeral and other expenses, had a few pounds left of his means which was equally divided amongst his children. He had appointed my father his administrator. He had reared up a family of six children, three sons, William, John and Samuel (who died in Liverpool leaving a wife and three children), three daughters, Ann, Susan, and Elizabeth, each of whom had married and had numerous families, namely, Chamberlain, Bentley, and Jones.

My father, John Bennion, was born in the town of Mancott, Parish of Hawarden, County of Flint, North Wales, on the 9th of November, 1786. In his youth, education in schools was mostly out of the reach of the day laborer. He had about one quarter's schooling, commenced to earn his living away from home at about twelve or fourteen years of age. From that time until he married he lived in the employ of different farmers in the Parish. He was married on the 14th of September 1811 at St. Mary's Church, Chester, to Elizabeth Roberts who was one of seven children, namely: John, Richard, Elizabeth, Sarah, Ann,

Maria, and Rebecca. My grandfather Roberts died in the eighty-first year of his age; my grandmother died about the same time in the eighty-second year of her age. They were both buried in the Hope Churchyard.

My father, after his marriage, changed his labors from a servant hired by the year to a day laborer at which he continued two or three years, having now saved a little money, he took a small farm to rent in the township of Moor in Hawarden Parish where he procured a comfortable livelihood for about twenty years; had about twelve acres of land for raising hay, grain, vegetables and pasture, besides a garden and orchards. While my mother had her health they increased in property so that when she was taken sick in the year 1823 of the dropsy, which sickness increased upon her. Also a few months before her death she had a stroke of palsy by which she lost the use of one side so that she had to be carried about in a chair. Her affliction increased until on May 1, 1830, she departed this life and was buried in the same grave with my grandfather and grandmother Bennion in Hawarden Churchyard. She raised four children, Mary, born at Moor Lane 25th of August, 1817; Samuel, born at Moor Lane December 11, 1818; John, born at Moor Lane July 9, 1820; Elizabeth, born at Moor Lane January 10, 1822. At the death of mother my sisters became housekeepers for father, which part they performed up till my father left for America.

Samuel left home at the age of twelve years; went to Uncle William to learn the baking business. I went to school when I could be spared until about fourteen years of age. When fifteen and at home it was dull prospects for farmers; my father thought it for the best to put me to learn a trade and engaged me to Mr. Rigby and Company, to boilermaking, where I stayed only about one year, at which time I left home and employ to go I know not where, but I was determined to leave home.

My father had been a member of the Methodist Society a number of years and had taught his children strict morals and religion; but as I grew up in my teens and became associated with boys who were less under religious influence, going to Sunday School and to hear preaching became burdensome to me, choosing rather to spend the Sunday with my comrades in some fun. One Sunday, I with two others were rambling through the fields with a dog a rabbit chasing when the dog caught one. A watcher came upon us and declared we were poaching. Next day we were summoned to appear before a justice for trial but I was

determined not to submit to such proceedings. I therefore took my departure another way and came to Liverpool.

After a few days search I got employ at Mr. Horton and Company's boiler yard. I did not like my shop mates and left at the end of three weeks and by this time I felt homesick so after my work was done on Saturday night I crossed the river on steamer and walked home, a distance of twenty miles. My people were glad to see me, to know where I had gone and what my prospects were. They were anxious to hear from me, I being young and inexperienced to leave home and go among strangers.

Next day I returned to Liverpool and after wandering about Lancashire for several days, settled in work again at Vauxhall Boiler Yard, lodging at Mr. Wainwright's. After I had wrought a few days the foreman proposed to hire me for the three years to which I agreed, first year for 10 s a week, second year for 12 s, third year for 14 s, which contract I fulfilled to the satisfaction of my employers.

About the last of my servitude my foreman asked me to engage for the three years more; I answered him hastily that he had not done as well as he might to me in times past, referring to his not teaching me the business. He said he had done well by me and that I was like unto throwing dust in his eyes so I must quit his employ. I then went to work for Vernon & Company; William Jones, foreman, had 20 s per week, labored there one year and a half, during which time I lodged with Peter Shone.

Soon after I came to Liverpool I became a member of Mr. Aitken's Society, or the Christian Society, and continued to be in membership until May, 1841. In 1840 two elders came to Liverpool to preach the gospel in its fullness; namely, John Taylor and Joseph Fielding. They came first to Mr. Aitken's chapel where I belonged. My attention was taken upon them as they came in chapel, although strangers. Elder Taylor, after the preaching, asked the privilege to make some remarks but could not, except to the leaders.

On account of Elder Taylor coming and teaching the way of salvation as it had been revealed from the heavens, there became quite a stir; a few believed and obeyed; some got angry and kicked against it while others gave heed to the cry of the priests saying, "Keep away from it, it is a dangerous delusion." I was amongst the last class. I kept away from it, fearing I might get caught in the snare, as they called it, until one evening, April 22nd, 1841, I was going to chapel; unawares I met Elder Domville, my former class leader; after passing

some compliments he commenced on religion and laid before me the way of salvation, as taught by the ancient apostles according to the scriptures; too plain and scriptural for me to reject. After this I resolved to investigate for myself, which, the more I did, the more I became convinced that it was not for [of] man but of God. After ten days I went to Elder Domville's house to inquire more about it. My inquiries were satisfied. Next day I attended the Saints meeting three times, forenoon, afternoon and evening, hearing preaching and testimony. I was now fully convinced, and resolved to obey. Accordingly, after the meeting was dismissed, I went, in company with some others, to the seashore and was baptized by Priest Robert Reid, and went to my lodgings rejoicing in the truth. This was on Sunday May 2nd 1841. On Tuesday evening I attended a meeting at Brother Harrington's where I was confirmed a member of Christ's Church under the hands of Elders James McGuffey and Richard Harrison.

My old religious acquaintance on hearing that I had embraced the faith and doctrine of the Latter Day Saints came to see me, and as they thought, to reclaim me from the error of my ways. They appeared to show much sympathy for me, saying that the course I had taken would lead me to hell. I reasoned with them from the scriptures, showing that the doctrine I had embraced was strictly in accordance with the scriptures; and that theirs was not. Soon they found that I was too fast grounded in Mormonism to be shaken loose, and after several visits in about nine days they gave up all hope of reclaiming me. Mr. Shone whom I lodged with felt sorry for me and more so for my Father who had taken much pains to bring me up religiously. He thought my course would be a source of much grief and sorrow to him; thereby, he said, I was breaking the commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother."

This caused me to reflect upon it and that same night I dreamed that I went home and instead of my folks being angry and reprimanding me for my course, they were silent on the matter and I had to introduce it myself. After a few days I went home on a visit, and as I had dreamed, so it was. They welcomed me, but as though some strange thing had happened to me that they feared to ask me about. This being on Saturday night, on Sunday I purposed going to Ewloe, two miles off, to meet with the Saints, but when I went to put on my coat, it was missing. My sisters had concealed it to prevent me from meeting with the Saints. When their Methodist Chapel time had come, my coat came to light and I started

with my father to his place of meeting. While on the way I showed from the Scriptures that the doctrine and faith that I had embraced was such as the apostles anciently preached and that there had been a falling away in the church also that God had restored the everlasting gospel with commissioned officers to administer the ordinances and that signs do follow them that believe. These things appeared strange to him but too scriptural for him to contradict. We attended chapel, heard a fine discourse from an itinerant preacher. His text was good but his comment was like sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.

Before I left home to return to Liverpool I made up my mind to come back home and work for father on his farm as I had left home when young and had not been of any or little help to him. I went back to Liverpool and gave my employer due notice to leave his employ, which I did. At the end of five and a half weeks after I was baptized I returned home. Before leaving Liverpool I was ordained a priest under the hands of John Greenhow and Thomas Domville, both high priests, in the house of Brother Thomas Hall. I went home to tarry; this was in the month of June, and commenced to labor for my father on the farm. On the first Sunday I went to the meeting of the Saints. They received me gladly, and as there was no higher officer present I had to take the lead of the meeting and stand up to preach for the first time. I spoke a short time under a great depression of spirits. I continued at home until February [1842], working for father in the daytime and meeting with the Saints evenings and Sundays, enjoying myself very well. At times I had to take the lead of small meetings and speak a little which became less of a task. I baptized five persons and labored in the branches around according to my ability. I also discovered by hearing and reflecting that the time had come for the Saints to gather to Zion. One day while I was at work with my father I made known to him that I felt it my duty to gather with the Saints and that the ship would sail in about two weeks and that I would like to sail in it. He replied that as he understood our faith he expected that I would at some time go, but did not expect that I would go so soon. But as he thought I knew what I was about he should not try to stop me. He told Mary, my oldest sister, to take money out of his box and give me to pay my passage. She said she would not hand out money to carry me away from home to a foreign land, never to see me any more, but my younger sister mustered courage and fetched out the money.

I started for Liverpool for the purpose of taking passage in the ship "Hope" which sailed February 5, but postponed my trip until the next shipload of Saints sailed three weeks later on the John Cummins. This was in order to take a wife with me who was not then ready. It then became publicly known that I was going to America. My old neighbors and friends came now to give me some friendly advice, to give up my strange notions and content myself at home; but the more they talked the more intent I became to go ahead.