

William White of Pembrokeshire and Salt Lake City

WILLIAM WHITE (1826-1905)

The small country of Wales is a peninsula 136 miles long and 96 miles at its widest point. It is located on the western side of Great Britain and is separated from it by the Cambrian Mountains. The rest of the country borders on the sea. William White was born to William and Martha Griffith White in the seacoast town of Fishguard, Pembrokeshire, on 21 September 1826. He was the first of 9 children, 3 boys and 6 girls born into his family. His father was a butcher and cabinet maker. His family moved to the adjacent town of Haverfordwest when he was a young man, where he met and married Ann Thomas (daughter of David and Elizabeth Nash Thomas), and where five of this 13 children were born.

William White and his father were wealthy butchers in Haverfordwest. Their great wealth came from furnishing meat to the English Navy. Haverfordwest was situated at the end of a deep inlet to the sea, and the Navy would bring ships up the inlet to the town to take on supplies.

While he was living in Wales, there was a great coal mine disaster and many people that worked in the mines were killed. Missionaries that were proselytizing at that time in Wales heard of the disaster and went to the stricken mines. They raised many people from the dead and blessed many others to become well. When he was about 26 years of age, William went to Swansea to work. It is about 50 or 60 miles from Fishguard, and while he was there, his parents heard the Mormon missionaries and became converted to the LDS church. His mother was immediately converted after the very first sermon. She was so impressed, that she walked the distance to Swansea to tell William that she had heard a man who had the truth and she wanted William to return with her to Fishguard to hear him too. They walked back together and he did listen. He did believe it was the truth and was immediately baptized. David Williams baptized him. He was baptized into the church 9 November 1852 at the age of 26. His parents also joined the church with their family. When it came time to marry, he chose for his wife a young woman of 22 by the name of Ann Thomas. She had been a member of the Church since 1851 and came from Merlins Bridge. They were married at Harroldstone, St. Issells by C. W. Adams of the Haverfordwest Branch. After their marriage, Ann and William went to Hakin to live and for the next 22 years William pursued his trade of butcher and bought and sold cattle. They lived in Hakin for a short while, then moved to Haverfordwest, then finally to Neyland. During these years they had twelve children, 4 of whom died in infancy.

William was very active in his church. For years he was clerk of the branch and at the request of Brigham Young, he stayed in Wales, even though he would have preferred to emigrate to Utah. When his mother died in 1865 his father left to join the saints in Utah,

settling in Paradise, Cache County, Utah. William also had a desire to come to Utah, but he was asked by the General Authorities to stay in Wales to help the saints emigrate. He was in charge of the Perpetual Emigrating Fund. For many years he served as President of the Haverfordwest branch of the Church and was afterward president of the Pembrokeshire Conference and was well known in the towns of Haverfordwest and Neyland, the place of his residence at the time of his emigrating to Utah, and throughout the county of Pembroke as a “staunch member of his unpopular church”. There was a great deal of opposition to the gospel in this area and those who joined the church underwent a lot of persecution and were most anxious to leave Wales and join the Saints in Utah. The members of the Haverfordwest Branch and the Pembrokeshire Conference in general, remained steadfast and there was hardly a case of apostasy or falling away from the faith.

On the 26th of February in 1873, Ann was giving birth to one of her children and passed away in childbirth. An interesting story concerning this birth was recorded by Susan Helme, a great-granddaughter of William White. “At the time of the birth of my grandmother, Myra Matilda White, her mother Ann was extremely ill. After the baby finally came, the nurse at my great-grandmother’s home noticed that the mother was not breathing. She told the doctor who had been called in by the midwife because of the difficult delivery. He worked with her for a while, but with no success. He said there was nothing more he could do, that she was dead. My great-grandfather, who was a member of the church, called to his eldest son John Henry, who was an elder and asked that he assist in administering to her. First they said a prayer and begged the Lord if it was His will to restore her life. Then they administered and my great-grandfather was impressed to tell his wife that her life would be restored and that she would live to come to Zion and raise her large family there.”

When William was praying to the Lord during this incident, he told the Lord that he needed his wife to raise all these small children and after the children were raised the Lord could take here at any time. All of these blessings were fulfilled and they did come to Salt Lake City. Margaret, the nurse who was present at the restoration of her patient’s life, was so inspired by this experience that she joined the church. And she remained with the family and came to Salt Lake City with them.

During his long connection with the Church in Pembrokeshire, William White lived to see nearly all of its members of that region emigrate to Utah; and when he himself emigrated in 1876 he brought with him all those remaining who could not pay their own traveling expenses to this country. When the Perpetual Emigrating Fund was dissolved, it was time for the White family to leave. William White announced that he would take with him any members who wanted to leave but didn’t have the money. William chartered a boat (*The Idaho*), paying for the whole ship himself, and while they were preparing to board the ship, two of William’s children broke out with chicken pox. This upset the ship’s captain so much that he said these two children would have to be left in Wales. They could not come on the boat because other people might catch chicken pox. William White said, “If these two children are not coming to America, nobody is going.” And so the ship’s captain took the children—chicken pox and all. A reference to this incident is

found in the journal of fellow passenger, Thomas Griggs who said:

“Some little stir was made by the rejection of the child of Brother White whose acquaintance I made in London, the matter was finally adjusted satisfactorily.”

They were lucky enough to be able to travel in the intermediate section of the ship and to be able to carry such things as oranges with them. They left Liverpool on June 28th, 1876. They landed in New York and immediately took the train to Salt Lake City. As the train was traveling through Pennsylvania, it had the bad luck to ram into another train, but as neither was traveling very fast, the damage was not severe. There were no injuries.

William White brought his eight living children and his wife with him. Also there were sixteen servants—two for each child. They traveled across the country by rail. In Omaha, young Will White, age 17, who was wearing a large diamond ring on his finger, hung his hand out the open window of the train. Someone outside noticed this beautiful diamond ring and grabbed the finger with the diamond ring. The train started pulling out, but the ring did not slip off the finger. The person outside didn't get the ring, but Will suffered a dislocated finger.

Upon their arrival in Salt Lake City on 18 July 1876, they were met by relatives and kept in their home until they could find a home of their own—this must have been quite a group of house guests! No indoor bathrooms at the time. Within three months of their arrival in Salt Lake, they went to the Endowment House on 10 October 1876. They looked for a house and found one across the street from the Devereaux House, but they were there for only a year when another child was born to them. They decided to buy a larger home. This home was on 4th West just north of First North. It was located on an old-time city lot of 1½ acres, had a large orchard and a truck garden with a lovely large spring that provided water for all. There they lived for a number of years and here the children were sent to the 16th ward school, a one teacher/one room school.

William White was well known in the Salt Lake Valley. He opened a butcher shop in downtown Salt Lake (38 West First South) under the name of White and Sons. They also bought and sold cattle and it wasn't long until they were engaged extensively in the livestock business, raising cattle, sheep, and horses. They purchased a large farm in Kaysville, a ranch in Cache Valley, property in North Salt Lake called White Hill where they operated a slaughter house—White Hill was located approximately where presently the freeway connects to North Salt Lake on the east side of highway 89.

He was the first to bring the white-faced cattle, the Hereford, to Utah and he raised them on his huge ranch on Antelope Island. His ranch covered about half the island.

When the slaughter house needed a supply of animals, a bonfire would be lit on White Hill and this was a signal for the caretakers on the island to send a boatload of cattle over to the slaughter house. Along with importing cattle, they exported sheep to England and at one time were the largest operators in the west, doing business in all the Intermountain area, as well as in California.

In about 1893, William Glassman had 12 head of Bison he wanted to get rid of. He sold them to White and Sons and they were also taken to the island. A few of them were sold for \$300 each, but most of them were allowed to roam the island unmolested. At that time, they were the only privately owned herd of buffalo in the US.

The William White family moved to a new home at 272 North 2nd West—across the street from the present West High School. It was here at the time of the Manifesto that President Wilford Woodruff, President Joseph F. Smith, Apostle George Q. Cannon, and others became the private guests of the White's for a period of time. At this time, young Will White, his wife and baby son were also living there and there were still five younger children at home. William White did not enter into polygamy. The only time he ever mentioned it to his wife was to tell her that she needn't worry, he wasn't going to take any more wives. Her answer to that had been, "William, you can have as many wives as you want, but you won't have me."

William White was a very wealthy man. He was so wealthy that it is told by some of his great grandchildren that his children rode to school in a carriage while all the other children walked to school. He also had a "live-in" artist in his home that he commissioned to paint paintings for him. One of the paintings is a traditional Welsh woman in her traditional Welsh dress and Welsh bonnet looking out over her garden.

William White was a patriarch in Salt Lake City. Therefore he was acquainted with many of the General Authorities and presidents of the Church. An interesting incident concerning President John Taylor occurred when the U.S. Marshals were looking for him because of the Church's practice of polygamy. On the day that he went into hiding in William White's home, Myra Matilda came home from school, greeted her mother and ran upstairs to her bedroom. As she went to open the door, the butt of a gun came out and told her to halt. This frightened her and she ran back downstairs to ask her mother what had happened. Her mother said, "Myra, you mustn't tell anybody about this. The President of the Church is hiding up in your bedroom and nobody is ever to know."

Another version of this story is from Margaret Neal Anderson. She said:

"There is a labyrinth of tunnels extending in all directions from the Church block on South Temple between Main and State Streets. One of these tunnels led to the home of the William White family at 275 North 200 West, and by way of these tunnels several general authorities of the Church, in desperate need to escape the clutches of federal law enforcers, who were after them for practicing polygamy, came to be the 'guests' of the Whites. In a home away from home and being pursued as they were, these brethren were nervous and consequently broke many tea cups of their hostess, Ann Thomas White. White son John Henry White was preparing to return home from his mission in England, he was contacted and instructed by the First Presidency to buy, at their expense, a lovely set of English china for John's mother, to replace the many pieces of china they, in their nervousness, destroyed."

In 1898, Ann Thomas White became very ill. Her husband in a blessing many years before had asked the Lord to leave her on the earth to raise her children. And at this time most of her children were raised. She became very sick and asked her husband to give her a blessing, and he dedicated her to the Lord. She died on the 7th of August 1898. This story must have gotten around because later one of the daughters of Brigham Young, Susa Young Gates was very ill. It was suggested that she ask Patriarch William White to come in and give her a blessing. She did but when he arrived she said to him, "Patriarch White, if you have any intention of dedicating me to the Lord, I don't want a blessing, but if you bless me to get well, then you many give me a blessing". This story is recorded in *Daughters of light*, by Carol Lynn Pearson.

For twenty years, White and Sons was a prosperous concern, but in 1898 two things occurred that helped to change things. William's wife, Ann, died on August 7, 1898, and the country experienced a stock market crash that same year. The White boys, of whom all five were now associated with the company, persuaded their father to turn the business over to them and he agreed. Also, large Eastern meat packing companies started coming into Salt Lake and prices of livestock were cut and undercut. As the company faltered, properties were mortgaged to try to save it. One after another the properties were lost. Even homes were mortgaged and lost and William's home was the first. He went to live with a married daughter and spent more and more time at the temple doing ordinance work. He did the work for hundreds of his kin, and was a completely dedicated and tireless worker. After retiring from the business of White and Sons, William dedicated much of his time and personal expense to temple work.

In the summer of 1905, his health started failing and he had to cut short a visit to Weber, Boxelder and Cache Counties and return to Salt Lake to doctor a very bad cold and fatigue. In the fall, he started back at the temple and the last time he was away from the house was spent there, but on November 27th he was much worse and called for all his family to come to his bedside for a blessing. They all came. He lived until December 11, 1905. The *Deseret News* of that evening said, "Patriarch White Dead. Passed away this morning at family residence. Died of Brights Disease."

On his death bed, his family gathered around him. After blessing his children and grandchildren he told them, "I want to testify to you, and to the whole world if possible, for the last time in mortality, that I do know that Joseph Smith, Jr., was indeed a true prophet of the living God, foreordained to be the restorer of the everlasting Gospel in this dispensation of the world's history; and that 'Mormonism' is nothing more or less than the everlasting Gospel restored again for the salvation and exaltation of all those who obey its requirements. And I pass away full of joy, being conscious of the knowledge that I have been true to my God; true to my family and true to my fellowmen. And all I ask of you, my children is to follow me, as I have followed Christ our Redeemer."

William White was buried in the Salt Lake Cemetery on the 14th of December 1905. He left nine children, thirty-three grandchildren, and he was seventy-nine years old. He had enjoyed more of the luxuries of life than most, had lived to see most of the material things he had accumulated swept away. He had reared a large family, had loved his

Church with all his heart and worked hard for it. He had helped many converts emigrate to Utah and Helped many others in untold ways.

[Taken from a tape made by LeeAnn Parker, great-granddaughter and from the obituary of William H. White and a history of William White given by Deloris White at a DUP meeting on 12 February 1979.]