

JOHN ROBERTSON McDUFF 1801-1871

John Robertson McDuff. This is a short sketch of his life. The combined experiences of he and his wife and members of their family, in learning of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and of their coming on to Utah is told in more detail following this sketch.

John Robertson McDuff, a son of John and Ellen Robertson McDuff, was born October 17, 1801 at Lochgilphead, Argyelshire, Scotland. His father's trade was masonry and he was a mason worker, but John learned the stocking trade. He later worked in the mines in England and also became good in bookkeeping and accounting. He lived both at Lochgilphead and at Keer Dunfreeshire to his early adulthood, when he emigrated to England, living in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire districts. He married while still living in Scotland, and they had three children. In the early part of the 1820's about 1834 or 1835, black smallpox was raging in many parts of Great Britain. John Robertson had the misfortune of losing his wife and their three children all within a few days of each other, from that dread disease. It was not long after their deaths that he decided to leave Scotland and go to England to make a new life for himself. It was here that he met his second wife, Ellen Hancock Burns, a young widow, and together they heard of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. How they accepted it and their lives together are now combined in one story. John Robertson had been a widower for about five years, and Ellen a widow for nine, when they married.

JOHN ROBERTSON McDUFF and ELLEN HANCOCK BURNS

This is a history of John Robertson McDuff and Ellen Hancock Burns from the time of their marriage, joining the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and then on to Utah.

The St. Paul's Church in Nottingham was the scene of the marriage for John Robertson McDuff and Ellen Hancock Burns, on September 15, 1839. John Gill and Jane Hancock (who signed with a cross) were their witnesses. It was a happy occasion for the young couple as they had both been married before, but had had the misfortune to lose their mates. They now could start anew and make a good home for each other and for the young son of Ellen, Charles Burns. Charles grew to love and respect his new father, but he always carried his own father's name of Burns.

John and Ellen's first home together was at Owens Court, Swenton Street, Nottingham, Notts, England. It was here, on April 5, 1840 that their first child, Mary Ellen, was born. Later they moved to Ball Yard, Caulpit Lane, where their son Malcolm was born. It was at this time that John and Ellen first heard of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and its teachings through the missionaries that were laboring in that district. They were Elders John Nicholson and Joseph F. Smith, who later became President of the Church. They opened their hearts gladly to the message it brought, and they were also the first to open their home to the missionaries in the Nottingham district. They were soon converted to its teachings and on February 14, 1845, John Robertson was baptized by Elder Charles Marsden, and on June the 8th following, Ellen was also baptized. By that time another daughter, Sarah Anna, had been born to them. John advanced rapidly in the priesthood, and by 1852 he was ordained a local Elder laboring in the Nottingham and Derbyshire districts. Soon after their joining the Church, John moved his little family to Brampton, near the city of Chesterfield, Derby, England where stands the historic Old Church with its crooked spire. Here three more children were born to them, John Robertson, Jr., who died early in his first year, Ada Alice, and last, Jane Rowen. While residing in Brampton he worked in the mines as a collier, going back and forth to his work on the cars, a distance of about five miles. The hours of labor in those days were very long and few were the daylight hours spent at home. But Sunday was the Lord's day and he spent it in God's service, sometimes holding street meetings with the Elders. On these occasions the family attended and rendered helpful service with their beautiful singing. John Robertson was ordained a local Elder, as was he for some years prior to their coming to Utah, President of the branch at Brampton. Their home at Brampton was always open to the missionaries when they visited that part of England and scores of Elders partook of their hospitality. Their home was a plain stone and brick two-story cottage, roofed with tile, which is common in the country districts of England. A large fireplace with built-in oven, and with old fashioned andirons and a kettle suspended, threw a cheerful glow which warmed and partially lighted their combined living room and kitchen. For it was before stoves were in common use and candles were the only means of lighting. A little garden patch and meadow with a brook running through it was in the rear, and here their children could spend many happy hours. The brook, a little farther down stream widened out and became deeper, making a splendid place for

baptisms. Some of the first baptisms in this part of England were solemnized here. Mary Ellen, along with her brothers and sisters, recalled that many times they went in the evening and held lanterns while this sacred ordinance was performed. The reason for holding the baptisms at night was that greater privacy could be had, as it was near a busy highway, and during the day people were constantly passing to and fro. It was probably in their own brook that the children of John and Ellen were baptized, for Charles Burns was baptized December 17, 1849, and the next years December 14, 1850, when Mary Ellen was ten and Malcolm was eight years of age, they too were baptized. And then two years later, on November 14, 1852, when Sarah Anna was eight, when was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On some of the early church records in the different branches of the Church in England their baptism dates differ. This was due to the fact that as they moved from one branch or district to another, they were usually re-baptized, as that was the system used instead of recommends being transferred as in use today.

Ellen McDuff as well as her children, both boys and girls, had beautiful voices and had trained themselves to sing together. At meetings and socials in the old country as well as when they came to Utah, nothing lacked in the way of musical programs when they were present. "Oh, Ye, Mountains High, where the clear blue sky arches o'er the vales of the free," was ever the goal for which their hearts yearned and for which they were ever striving: consequently it was necessary that all should work to get the means. John Robertson was considered well educated for that time. He was always striving to better himself in employment, thus he learned the bookkeeping and accounting trade, and adapted himself very well to it. By this time he had made himself known to his employers and had been given a position in the office of the company. When his company learned that he was intending to go to America, they offered him many inducements to stay with them, but nothing could swerve him from his purpose of gathering to Zion. To be near his work, where it would save him many miles a day, plus the time of going back and forth, they moved into Chesterfield. John was very active there as a local Elder, and also as Branch President.

As the older ones married, the younger ones then worked doing whatever they could. When the younger girls turned eight years old, they too were baptized. One of the daughters, Ada, worked in a bobbin factory. It was there that she was subjected to the sneers of her associates because she had faith in an unpopular religion. They all spent few days in school, but they made the best of it and learned to read and write at home. It was a small beginning but they kept themselves well informed.

Charles Burns, Ellen's son, was the first of the children to marry. On November 17, 1851 he married Martha Fretwell, in Chesterfield (the Church with the crooked spire), Notts, England. They made their home in Brampton where Charles worked in the coalmines. They were the parents of eleven children, including two sets of twins. Their first six children were born in Brampton, Derby, England and the next five were born in Salt Lake City, Utah. He and his family emigrated to America and on to Utah in the early months of 1868. On October 23, 1868, their first child to be born in Utah, Charlotte, was born.

In 1870 their first set of twins, boys, were born but they passed away soon after birth. Then in 1871, they lost Charlotte, thus the first ones born in their new home, lived but a short time. Again, on October 23, 1874, twin girls were born to them, Ellen and Hannah, who grew to be lovely young ladies, married and had families of their own. In February of 1878, Charles' wife Martha passed away, leaving him with small children to care for. Then on May 28, 1878, he married Susannah Lord Oliver. They had two children, Laura and James Edward Burns.

Ten years after Charles married, Mary Ellen, the eldest of John and Ellen, was married to William Varley, a son of Thomas and Maria Slater Varley. They were married February 24, 1861 in the Chesterfield Parish Church, famous for its crooked spire. On April 14, 1861, Mary Ellen and William, along with his mother, and Malcolm McDuff, Mary Ellen's brother, left England for America and then on to Utah. Thus the first of the McDuff family had fulfilled their dreams of making a new home in Zion. It took them six weeks to cross the ocean, enduring many hardships, as their boat was only a small sailing vessel. Mary Ellen was sea sick most of the way over, which only added more to their hardships. They were four months crossing the plains in ox teams with Captain William S. Warren's Company, arriving in Utah in September of 1861.

On December 11, 1861, their son William Jr. was born. He was the first of their ten children to be born to them. They settled in Bountiful, where William worked at farming or anything else he could get for the first years.

Malcolm McDuff married Jane Lord, an English girl he had met in Captain Warren's company in 1866 in Utah. They were the parents of seven children.

In May of 1864, John Robertson's and Ellen's second daughter, Sarah Anna was married to Thomas Hancock and they emigrated to Utah in 1865. Sarah and Thomas never had children of their own, but they always took a great deal of interest in their nieces and nephews, and as their children came along, they enjoyed them too.

Shortly after the marriage of their daughter Sarah in 1864, John Robertson and Ellen along with the two remaining girls, Ada and Jane, ages 14 and 9 years respectively, left their home in England for their new home and a new life among their family now in Utah. It was just three years since the first of the family left England and it was seven years before all the family was together again.

John, Ellen and the girls crossed the ocean in an old sailing vessel named the George B. McClellan, after one of the generals of the North in the Civil War, which was near its close. To avoid possible molestation by vessels of the South, they took a northern course and ran into fields of icebergs. Whichever way they looked they could see those great mountains of ice as they slowly wended their way southward, there to be melted by the warmer waters of the Gulf Stream. There was great danger of running into them, especially when they were nearing the foggy banks of Newfoundland and extra caution was used to prevent it. But suddenly one night after the passengers had retired to their

bunks below, there was a grating and a tremendous lurch of the vessel, which threw many from their beds, and spread confusion everywhere. Twice more this was repeated. The vessel gradually sank back, rolling from side to side as though she were about to turn over. Women and children were crying, men were hurrying to and from, and the greatest confusion prevailed. The thing that they had most feared had happened. The ship had struck an iceberg and it was feared a rent had been made in her that would let in the icy waters and send her to the bottom of the sea.

After the confusion had been somewhat allayed, the mate of the vessel was sent with a lantern to examine carefully all parts of the ship for a possible leak. He passed the bunk where the young girls Ada and Jane were. They were peering through their curtains with their faces resting between their hands. "Little girls", he said, "Aren't you afraid", and almost in unison they said, "No, we're not afraid. The Lord didn't bring us here to be drowned in the sea". Then in a burst of joy the mate swung his lantern round and round and cried out a loud as he could "Hurrah! This vessel won't sink, there's faith enough to save any ship". She did not sink. A company of God's people were aboard going to the place divinely appointed to them, and His watchful care was over them. The next year while the George B. McClellan was making a voyage across the ocean, she was caught in a storm and went down, carrying all on board.

The above story was told to members of the McDuff family and it was recorded in their family history. From "Heart Throbs of the West", Vol. 5, p. 209, this is another pioneer's account of the voyage.

"Very early one morning the tarred rigging of the ship caught fire, which spread with increasing rapidity among the ropes and sails. Great excitement prevailed when the cry of 'Fire' was heard. It was soon extinguished and did little damage to the ship".

After a six weeks voyage, they landed at Castle Gardens, New York. It was near the close of the Civil War, and just before their arrival, a great battle had been fought, and the sick and wounded were being brought from the front. John and Ellen as well as their two young daughters, remembered very vividly the feeling of gloom and scenes of sorrow that were occasioned by these sad homecomings.

They left New York and traveled by river steamer and railroad cars for two weeks before they reached Winter Quarters. There they waited six weeks for the ox teams to come from Utah to take them to their destination in the Salt Lake Valley. The captain was William S. Warren, who was also the captain of the ox team company that their daughter Mary Ellen and husband William Varley, his mother and also their son Malcolm had when they crossed the plains, three years before in 1861. Captain Warren afterwards lived in Parowan, Iron County, Utah.

It took them eleven weeks to cross the plains and come from Winter Quarters to Utah. Because of the Civil War, most of the Indians were on the warpath, and greater care had to be taken. Frontier settlements had been plundered and burned and many settlers had

been killed. More than once they came upon ranch houses that had been pillaged and burned and the settlers massacred. One incident they especially remembered was a place in which a whole family had been murdered. Evidently the Indians had been scared away by the approach of the Mormon emigrant train and fled in haste. Around the table, where they had evidently just been seating themselves to their mid-day meal, were their bodies, scalped and shot through with arrows, while on the table was the meal, untouched.

Because of the danger from warring Indians, the companies of Saints at that time were especially large in order to protect themselves. At one time they were joined by a company of ten or twelve mule teams for a number of days and finally they became tired of the slow pace that the oxen were able to make, they forged on ahead. The next day the Mormon train came to a place where the California emigrants had all been massacred, their wagons burned, and their mules stolen. Not a man, woman or child lived to tell the story. There they lay pierced with arrows, horribly mutilated and left rotting in the sun.

Such scenes as these made a lasting impression on all their minds. But not all was horror. They remembered seeing great herds of buffalo as they grazed on the plains. At one time their train was stopped for hours waiting for the buffalo to pass as they wended their way down to the river for water. At night, even though they had been walking, weary and footsore, fording streams and picking up the buffalo chips to cook their evening meal,, they surrounded the campfires and sang: "Come, Come Ye Saints, No toil nor labor fear, But with joy wend your way". Music, dancing and other merry makings were often indulged in. But promptly at nine o'clock a prayer was said, thanking God for His blessings bestowed during the day and invoking His aid on the morrow. Soon the fires died down, and the camp save for a few pickets left to guard the cattle, was wrapped in slumber. The next morning the camp bugle was sounded and everyone was up preparing for the day's trek. The first wagon to arrive the night before was usually the first wagon to leave. So large was their train that as much as an hour elapsed between the departure of the first and last wagons.

Soon after their arrival in the valley, the family settled in North Salt Lake. It was there that Ada was stricken with Rocky Mountain Fever, a disease that often attacked the emigrants before they became used to the climate. They were in a new and strange country and a living was to be made, consequently the girls had to get work. They worked in the fields gleaning, picking potatoes and at housework for those better situated in life than they were. It didn't take the McDuff family long to get a good flourishing business started. They started the second lime burning and quarry business in Utah. Malcolm McDuff and his brother-in-law, William Varley, ran the business for several years. Then as William had sons, and sons-in-law of his own, they continued on with the business at North Salt Lake and then later in Parleys Canyon. William Varley was also in the lime burning business with Frank Pasco, Simon Bamberger, and Thomas Everill.

John built his family a beautiful home on the outskirts of Salt Lake City, just south of where Beck's Hot Springs was located for so many years. It was a long stone building, and was considered one of the best homes in Utah, and especially in that part of the city.

Here they enjoyed the association of their family and their grandchildren. Their home was at the north end of the old 19th Ward district, and was the scene of many church socials for all the Saints at that part of the Ward. Here the family continued their devotion to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church, being teachers to both friends and relatives. They were true Latter-day Saints believing in all the principles of the Gospel with a sincere trusting faith. To them it was the biggest thing in life, and it held for them the most glorious promise for the life to come. They never failed to impress its truths upon their children and grandchildren, encouraging them to read and know for themselves. Its poetry and music especially appealed to Ellen and her girls. She knew and loved to sing the songs of Zion, and they were taught to her family. The family, enjoying a “musical get-together” spent many wonderful evenings. And by precept and example she endeavored to implant in their hearts a sincere faith in the mission of Joseph Smith and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And as each of their family arrived in Utah, as they themselves, they all took advantage of going through the Endowment House, fulfilling the promise of the life to come. Then as grandchildren and great-grandchildren came along, long after the deaths of John Robertson and Ellen McDuff, they too were told of the main highway out of the city going north, and all who knew of it looked forward to see it as they passed that way. Recently, in order to make room for the super highway, the old familiar landmark of the descendants of John and Ellen McDuff was torn down, but I am sure a few of us who pass that way, still look expecting to see it.

Malcolm McDuff and his wife lived in the home for many years. Then when John Robertson and Malcolm passed on, and still later Ellen, Jane, Malcolm’s wife and some of her children lived there for several years.

By now the younger girls, Ada and Jane had grown to be lovely young ladies. When Ada was nineteen, in 1869, she was married to Henry Rampton of Bountiful. Eight of their nine children were born there, and the last one, a girl, was born in Syracuse, Utah. They lived in Bountiful until 1885 when they moved to Syracuse. Their last child, Laura, passed away at age four, from black canker. The rest all grew to marry and have sons and daughters of their own.. Ada was very active in church work, both in Bountiful and Syracuse, working in the Primary Association and Relief Society. She also sang in the Bountiful Choir, missing only when it was impossible to get there.

John Robertson McDuff passed away October 17, 1871 and his beloved wife Ellen, joined him on August 11, 1883. They surely deserve to be numbered with our pioneers. Those noble men and women, who gave up all for the Gospel’s sake and endured privations and hardships built up by patient toil, a great common wealth in the midst of the Rocky Mountains.

On July 6, 1874, nearly three years after the death of her father, Jane, the last of the McDuff family to marry, was married in the Endowment House to William Lorenzo Butler. They became parents of ten children, and then they adopted a son, Joseph (Thum). Jane and William lived in Salt Lake City on Third East between Second and

Third South Streets. They had lived in several homes before this became their last home. It was here they raised most of their children and where they passed away.

In 1883, with the passing of their mother, the remaining family now consisted of the four girls, Ellen, Sarah, Ada and Jane, along with their sister-in-law Jane and their half-brother, Charles Burns. They continued to grow and prosper with their own families and a great love for each other continued through the year. Mary Ellen and her family had now moved into Salt Lake City, where they built them two homes, on 5th North between First and Second West Streets, moving into the last one early in 1891 before their daughter Ellen was married in June. The remaining children at home finished their education at the Irving School that was located by the side of their Ward meeting house. When it came time for their children to marry seven of their remaining eight children, as two daughters had passed away, were married in the House of the Lord. Thus the Gospel teachings in their home did not waver.

Just East of the Varley home on 5th North, Sarah and Thomas Hancock built them a home. There was a lane dividing the two homes, but the two sisters were close to each other for their remaining days. As Sarah and Tom had no children of their own, they helped to raise two of her sister Jane's children, Thomas and Dora Butler. All who knew Aunt Sarah and Uncle Tom loved and respected them, especially their nieces and nephews, whom they took a delight in having them visit them, and then as the next generation came along, they too loved Aunt Sarah and Uncle Tom, and delighted in visiting them.

After Charles Burns and his family came on to Utah, they, too, settled in Bountiful where he associated himself with the McDuff Brothers in the lime kiln and quarry business. Later he raised fruit and vegetables and kept a small store in Bountiful. There was always a great love and friendship between the two families and as the cousins grew and married and had families of their own, they continued to carry on the friendship with each other. The Burns families were always included when a McDuff reunion was held.

Thus the dreams and ambitions of John Robertson and Ellen Hancock Burns McDuff came to pass. They saw their sons and daughters grow and prosper in the new land of Zion where they too were privileged to join the Saints. They saw what they had strived for in England become not just a dream, but a reality, and they left a noble heritage for their posterity to honor and respect.

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