

*A life sketch of*

# John Stevenson

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1806 – 1862

John Stevenson was born the 13th of April, 1806 and was married on the 26th of November, 1827 to Elizabeth Wilmott. Elizabeth passed away in 1832. The following year, John married Mary Vickers. John and Mary were the parents of 14 children (four of which died in as infants).

John was rather short in stature and slender, as was also his wife, Mary Vickers. He had dark hair and brown eyes. Mary had black, wavy hair and dark eyes. She was very trim and neat. John was a musician as a young man, and also composed poetry and wrote considerable prose. He was a master shoemaker by trade. He had a shop in town and hired his help, as he was rather delicate physically.

Mormon missionaries made their appearance in Derbyshire in the very early days of the church. John and Mary asked for baptism in 1850. Mary was the first to be baptized in January of that year and John followed her in February. Two years later the three oldest of their children were baptized and then the remaining children as they reached the age of accountability.

In the early spring of 1862, the Stevenson family made ready to migrate to Zion. They were obliged to sacrifice many valuable things and leave them behind. Family ties had to be severed and goodbyes said to brothers, sisters, relatives and friends. They could take with them only the barest of necessities, for they had a long journey ahead of them, and every pound of luggage to care for was an added burden. They left everything in their home as it stood for the new family that would be moving in after them. The one piece of furniture that was the hardest for the children to leave behind was the grandfather clock. It was a tall clock which reached almost to the ceiling and had long pendulums with china ends.

Mary's share of her father's estate provided the means for their transportation, which was arranged for through the help of the church authorities in the district. John deposited eight pounds and four shillings with George Q. Cannon on the 18th of April, 1862 to pay for passage from Liverpool England to Florence, Nebraska.

They set sail on the packet ship "John J. Boyd", commanded by Captain J.H. Thomas, which sailed from Liverpool on April 23rd, 1862 for New York with 702 saints on board. Before their departure, the Apostles, Charles C. Rich, Amasa M. Lyman, and George Q. Cannon visited the ship as it lay in the River Mercy. They organized the company into nine wards and appointed leaders over them and teachers over them.

The ship moved slowly even from the start. It took four days at sea before they finally lost sight of the land they had left behind. During the voyage on the ocean, Mary was ill most of the way and she came close to dying many times. John, however, enjoyed better health during the voyage than he had done for some time. They experienced all kinds of weather; from a dead calm to a heavy gale. On May 1st, the wind was so strong that it carried away the jib boom, and the foretop gallant mast. The voyage of this company across the Atlantic took much longer than usual due to the strong head winds. On the trip there were cases of measles and whooping cough and there were seven deaths. The saints arrived safely in New York harbor on the 30th day of May, 1862.

From New York, the company travelled by train and using steamboats whenever they had large bodies of water to cross. They travelled past Niagara Falls, were ferried over the Mississippi River and eventually arrived in Florence, Nebraska.

In Florence, known to the Saints as Winter Quarters, the company was turned over to Joseph W. Young. Winter Quarters was located on the west bank of the Missouri River and served as an outfitting camp for the covered wagon trains that were heading west.

The Stevensons were delayed at Winter Quarters while they waited for captains to be appointed and companies to be organized for the arduous trek across the plains. Most of the people in Winter Quarters lived in tents, but a man by the name of Bracken had a lumber room for storing grain and he kindly offered the extra space in that room to the Stevenson family. They swept the grain off the floor and stacked the bags in one corner to make it as comfortable as possible. There was no furniture. They cooked their meals over a camp fire and made their beds on the floor.

While they waited for their company to be organized, two of John and Mary's sons, George and Amos, went down to the Missouri River to see a boat full of immigrants arriving. The day was very hot and Amos suffered from a sunstroke and had to be taken back to the camp. This later developed into Typhoid fever and he was very ill for several weeks. He lay on the floor in blankets and everyone tried to keep him comfortable. In his delirium he would call for his accordion to be brought to him so that he could play for the folks to dance. Amos finally passed away in July of 1862 a few months before his 19th birthday. He was buried in Florence, after a brief service conducted by some of the brethren there. His casket was a crude wooden box, but it was the best that could be obtained. John carefully filled in the cracks and holes to make it as tight as possible.

This was a great trial for the family. They had already been called upon to sacrifice so much for their religion. Now they had lost the oldest child that was still living with them. Mary had relied on Amos a great deal because John's health hadn't allowed him to provide the care the family needed. Amos had been a favorite among all the children and now even his grave would be left behind never to be seen again.

The Stevensons were in the first company of emigrants to sail from Europe in 1862, and would have been the first company to cross the plains that year had it not been for the sickness they endured. Most of those who had crossed the ocean with them had already gone on to Utah when the Stevensons were just starting out.

The company on the whole had a prosperous journey with very little sickness and no serious accidents. The wagon train arrived in Salt Lake City in October of 1862. They were weary and worn, but they were happy to be at their journey's end.

At their arrival, John became terribly ill and remained so for ten days until he passed away on October 11, 1862. The interment took place three days later in the City Cemetery.

This new trial was incredibly difficult for Mary. Kind friends ministered as best they could, but in those early days, few people had anything extra to give after caring for their own families. And Mary had several children to provide for in addition to herself.

The children helped their mother through this crisis and established themselves as they grew. The family remained active in the church all their lives and were well respected in the community.

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Source: <http://trees.ancestryinstitution.com/tree/12049924/story?pgNum=2>