

A life sketch of
Charles Wilkins, Jr.

1827 – 1896

Charles Wilkins, Jr. was born December 28, 1827, at Bucklebury, Berkshire, England. Charles was the fifth child of Jane Rixon and Charles Wilkins Sr.¹ The family continued to grow and would eventually include nine children; three girls and six boys. One girl died at the age of eight and two of the boys died as infants. The other children all lived to be adults.¹ The Wilkins family lived on a farm near Bucklebury where Charles Sr. worked as a blacksmith. When Charles was a young man he worked for a gentleman who grew reed that was used to make baskets.²



Charles and his brother, John, were baptized and became members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on September 19, 1849. His father, mother and sister, Elizabeth, were baptized June 9, 1855.²

On June 2, 1850, Charles married Elizabeth Drinkwater at Thatcham, Berkshire, England. Elizabeth was born January 16, 1831 at Cold Ash, Thatcham, Berkshire, England and was the daughter of James and Sarah Hawkins Drinkwater.¹

On Wednesday, January 8, 1851, Charles and Elizabeth sailed from Liverpool, England aboard the immigrant sailing vessel 'Ellen'. Their destination was America and a place called Utah. On the ship's register, Charles was listed as twenty-two and Elizabeth's age was nineteen. His occupation was recorded as 'laborer'. There were 466 immigrating Latter-day Saints on board under the direction of James W. Cummings, who was an appointed Church leader for the company. All passengers boarded 'Ellen' on January 6, but were delayed and remained anchored in the river opposite Liverpool for several days due to violent storms a few miles out to sea.³

On January 8, the anxious crew pulled anchor and ran their ship at the rate of seven miles an hour until about eleven o'clock that night. Again they encountered severe weather and received some major damage to the ship. The following day 'Ellen' entered the port of Cardigan Bay at New Wales for repairs. The boarded immigrants were forced to exercise patience as they waited to embark on their journey. It was a cold and stormy time of year for sea travel. The wind changed the day the vessel was put into port and they remained in port for three weeks. The forced stay proved to be a blessing for the anxious travelers as many ships and lives were lost because of the storms that were raging at this time. On January 23, 'Ellen' once again set sail for America. As the winds filled her sails, passengers lost sight of the Irish Coast. It was February 1, and they were finally on their way.³

Conditions aboard the ship were very poor. Nearly every child had measles, as well as many of the adults. During the voyage there were ten deaths due to a severe cough similar to whooping cough, six marriages and one birth.³

In order to meet the needs of the Church members they were divided into twelve wards, which were made up of ten berths in each ward. The wards had an appointed president who was chosen to organize and supervise the saints he was assigned to. Each ward was then divided into two groups and men were appointed to visit every family in each group twice a day. They would administer to the sick and evaluate the needs, and if possible provide help to their fellow passengers.³

Finally, in spite of bad weather and strong head winds, 'Ellen' docked at New Orleans on March 14, 1851. The company was grateful to set foot on American soil. Arrangements were made and Church leaders chartered the steamer, 'Alexander Scott', which would take the immigrants to St. Louis, Missouri. They paid the \$2.50 fare for each adult and \$1.25 for each child. Charles and Elizabeth left New Orleans the morning of March 19 and with their fellow travelers sailed up the Mississippi River. They docked at St. Louis, ten days later on March the 26th. Two children had died and one had been born during the trip.³

Charles and Elizabeth temporarily settled in Madison County, Illinois where Charles found employment working for a farmer named Atwood. Over the next three years, they saved as they could to purchase the necessary supplies and equipment to travel on to Utah.²

On May 9, 1852, Charles and Elizabeth had a daughter they named Lillian. She was born at Alton, Madison, Illinois.¹

In 1854, the Wilkins family was ready to go west! They had acquired an ox team and a lynchpin wagon loaded with their few possessions. Charles and his family became part of a wagon train made up of Latter-day Saints sharing the same goal – Utah! Along the way they saw many large herds of buffalo. Hunting parties were sent out to obtain fresh meat from these herds in order to help stretch the company's food supply.²

The wagon train was plagued by disease and many in the company contracted cholera. One man, whose wagon was near the end of the train, was a dear friend of the Wilkins family. He became very ill and died. Elizabeth was determined to go and see him before he was buried. Charles begged her not to go, but she insisted. Soon after the visit, Elizabeth became ill. She told Charles she believed she was going to die.² On June 23, 1854, near Fort Leavenworth, Leavenworth, Kansas, Elizabeth passed away.¹ Cholera was so contagious no one would come near the Wilkins' wagon. Charles wrapped Elizabeth in sheets and blankets and carried her out of the wagon to a grave some of the men in the company had dug for her. Charles placed her body on a straw tick that had been laid in the grave and then covered the site over. Charles and his little daughter, Lillian, left the lone grave along the prairie trail and continued on with the wagon train.²

A family named Welch from the Pilsdon area of England was traveling in the same wagon train as Charles. They helped Charles care for Lillian during the rest of the journey.² The Welch family consisted of the father, Job Welch; mother, Charlotte Rawlins Welch; and their two daughters, Honor and Uriah. Job's sister, Ann, was also in their group.⁴

In the fall of 1854, Charles, with his two year old daughter, Lillian, entered the Great Salt Lake Valley. The Welch family and Charles stayed close and were a great support to each other. The Welch family continued to help Charles care for Lillian.⁵

Charles and Uriah 'Ury' Welch were married in 1855 or 1856 at South Cottonwood, Utah Territory. They were later sealed in the Endowment House May 4, 1861 at Great Salt Lake, Utah Territory.¹

Ury was born May 5, 1842 at Pilsdon, Doretshire, England. She had been baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on October 31, 1851, after her family had arrived in America and were living in Illinois.¹ At the time of her marriage Ury was thirteen or fourteen years old and Charles was twenty eight or twenty nine.

This marriage was an instant blessing for Charles' little girl, Lillian. Ury took over the full time responsibilities of caring for Lillian. Ury loved Lillian as if she were her own child.⁵

Over the following thirty years Charles and Ury had fifteen children: Clarissa born October 11, 1857 at Willard, Box Elder, Utah and Ury Harriet born December 18, 1859 at Millcreek, Salt Lake, Utah. Their other children were born at South Cottonwood, Salt Lake, Utah. They were: Charles Albert born December 14, 1861, Heber Christopher born February 7, 1864, twins Nephi and Eli born March 18, 1866 (Eli died the same day), Jesse Lester born February 15, 1868, Charlotte Ann born April 7, 1870, William Henry born July 9, 1872, Mary Jane born October 21, 1874, Rueben born January 31, 1877, Andrew born February 13, 1879, Stephen Job born June 18, 1881, Lydia Louise born December 13, 1882 and Nettie Luella born July 25, 1885.¹

Charles and Ury lived for a while in the area that is now Willard, Box Elder, Utah. There they rented farm ground. Later they moved their family to South Cottonwood, Salt Lake, Utah where Charles bought a farm. This farm became the Wilkins home and it is where they lived for the remainder of their lives.² The 'Cottonwoods' was a beautiful area in the valley, but the sagebrush and oak brush was a challenge. After the brush was removed the hard ground had

to be made fit for farming. Charles and his sons worked from sun up to sun down improving the land, planting crops and harvesting what could be grown.⁵

The Wilkins home was described as a one room dwelling. Ury kept the family warm and fed using a large fireplace that was inside the home. The house had a willow fence around it that was quite unique. Wooden stakes were driven into the ground and green willows were woven between the stakes. Mud was then plastered to the willow fence frame.⁵

As their family grew Charles built a larger wooden home on the farm. Their new home was a story and a half high log house with two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs. It had a large lean-to off the back side. Their new home had a cooking stove, which was a cherished treasure for Ury. The Wilkins always stored enough wheat to last from one harvest to the next harvest as a precaution to prevent famine, which was a concern with their large family. In the new house there was a bin that held a thousand pounds of flour. This feature was especially nice for Ury as her large family ate many loaves of bread.⁵

Music was an important part of the Wilkins family life. Several of the children were self-taught violin players. Their music was heard in and out of the house and was shared with the community at different social activities.⁵

Charles wrote often to his family in England and encouraged them to join him in America. The challenge to pay the required passage for each member of the Wilkins family was overwhelming and just not possible for Charles. At this time, Charles Sr. did not have good health, however the decision was made that he and his youngest daughter, Elizabeth, would make the voyage and travel on to Utah. Once they were settled he would send for his wife, Jane. Charles Sr. and Elizabeth set sail from the docks of Liverpool, England for America April 23, 1862 on the ship 'John J. Boyd'.⁶

During the voyage, Charles Sr. continued to experience health problems. In Elizabeth's letter home to her mother she wrote, "Father died near a fortnight before we landed at New York."⁷ Charles Wilkins Sr. was buried at sea in the Atlantic Ocean.¹ Elizabeth arrived at New York on June 1, 1862. She continued her journey and reached the Great Salt Lake Valley

September 24, 1862. After her arrival in Utah, she found Charles and Ury and stayed with them for a short time.⁷

It took all the energy and effort Charles had to provide the necessities for his family. He continued to write to his mother in England and encouraged her to find a way to come and join her family in America. In his letters Charles tried to help his mother understand why he was unable to financially help her make the journey. Charles wrote:

It appears by the letter I had you wishes to come here and that you need help I have thought a great deal about it Still I have nothing to regret about on my part concirning the matter I have hat to fight my way through the best I could being inexperienced in the manadgment of the afaiers of life When I first went to Illinois I did not know how make money If I had I could of made a thousand dollars jest as easey as a hundred I saw that about the time I left their And when I come to this country it seemed still more strange no money pasing I felt rather bad Seemed onfortunate Had a great maney losses one way and another and still have them once in a wile Two hundred dollars whold hardly cover the loss I have had now within a year I have a wife and five children and to undertake to soport them by working out by the day whold be a pretty hard concern I have rented land for some time but I thought I might jest as well have land of my own as to have to pay rent for it And it takes means to get all these things I have a nice little farm situated in a good place and the land is very level Two years ago I had to bild a house and last year I had to bild a seller and a grainery and this year I have to bild a new stable And so you see there is always something to be done I have worked very hard and to a great disadvantage for want of means And that is the reason why I have been shaping things so that I whold not have to work so much And for a man to make aney kind of a start for himself he must be worth a 1000 dollars You may think perhaps I ought to have lots of _____ by me But the wants of a famley are maney and I am a man that likes to make my famley comfortable⁸

Charles wrote again:

I feel for you all that are tied in that oppressive country I have been onfortunate since I have been here and have lost property enough to bring you all out here I have been porrer than aney of you but I am fixing up my famley a little comfortable now If I had the means at my command I whold freely devote it to fetching those of you out here that wish to come I don't know of aneything that whold give me more joy But it is not in my reach⁹

Three years later Charles sent a letter to his mother and explained some good fortune that had come to him. He wrote:

Last year money was very plenty here and I did not know but what it might be the same now But things took a change and instead of plenty it is very Scarce indeed And I was not able to tell until about a week ago that I could do anything for you But as fortune wold have it I had a chance of doing a little hauling with my team It was a small Job and I went to work in good earnest and with good faith that it was the lord that had thrown it in my way to make the money This job had to be done in a herry so I went one sunday while the rest of the folkes was at meeting and felt perfectly Justified in doing so under the circumstances So that is the way I got the money and the reason I did not write was because I had not the money and I did not know where it was coming from And now I have not sent you as much as I wold like to have done but it is the best I can do So with a little good managment and econemey I guess you can make out to get along I live in hope of it at aney rate You will see upon this check or draught that you are to recive eight pounds You can show it to your precedent See that you get your rights and try and take care of yourself as much as possible¹⁰

With the money Charles sent and the aide of Church leaders in England, Jane was able to secure passage aboard the immigrant sailing ship, 'American Congress'. The ship set sail May 23, 1866 and arrived at New York on July 5, 1866. In the general voyage notes it reads, "...flying like a cloud towards the promised land."¹¹ Jane and the entire Wilkins family must have been elated as the family matriarch realized her dream and immigrated to America. She traveled across the plains and found her waiting family in the Utah Territory. Jane made a home with her daughter, Elizabeth, who lived near Charles in South Cottonwood.⁵

Besides farming, Charles hired out as a butcher. He butchered beef for years and supplied the meat to the Orson A. Wooley Butcher Shop in Murray.² At various times he took contracts to supply beef to other meat shops throughout the valley. Charles taught several of his sons the art of butchering and together they built a good business that kept them in demand for several years.⁵

In a letter written to her mother while she was still living in England, Charles' sister Elizabeth wrote, 'Charles is a teacher'.¹² In the 1870 Census his profession was listed as 'carpenter'.¹³ It is obvious Charles had many talents and was very resourceful in providing for

his family. He considered himself a self-taught survivor of the conditions that he was challenged with. His attitude about working hard and taking advantage of the opportunities afforded to all were expressed in a letter written to his mother. Charles wrote:

Now I never have seen the time yet but what there is a chance for men to free themselves from bondage and oppression if they will take it at the right time in ninety nine cases out of a hundred You will see young men in full viger and strength of body They will waste their strength and their substance that god has blessed them with and then get married in the depeths of poverty and then complain about it Now I whold ask a question Is god to blame for this I answer no We are all born in this world and it is our duty to make the best of it If you want a farm go where it can be got If you want a cow Get one If you want a horse Get one I look at it like this There is plenty of room in this world and plenty of land and if it is not where we are we had better go where it is I consider the air is as free for me to breathe as aney other man and if I can find a portion of land onocupied it is as free for me as aney other man Now do you sopose if I was in England with my present famley and know what I do that England whold hold me aney more than one year I tell you nay Jesus says save yourselves from this ontoward generation The man that rote your letter I don't know who he was Said there is a will their is a way That I fully believe⁸

Charles was active in the Church and served in many capacities. He served as one of the Presidents of the 73rd Quorum of Seventy organized at South Cottonwood, Great Salt Lake, Utah.⁵

Charles was involved in the development of South Cottonwood. He helped with the planning and construction of the first meeting house built there. The structure was noted as being the finest meeting house outside of Salt Lake.⁵

In 1872, Church leaders made plans for a cemetery to be located on the west side of Vine St. in the South Cottonwood area. Before this time, many pioneer families buried their loved ones in private cemeteries near their properties. The Salt Lake City Cemetery or nearby community cemeteries were also used but not always affordable or convenient. Men were called to clear off the sagebrush and level the ground, then fence it. The cemetery was originally named the South Cottonwood Ward Cemetery, but was later changed to the Murray City Cemetery. The first grave was dug in 1874. Charles Wilkins was chosen to be the first sexton of

this cemetery and oversaw much of its development. Charles served as the superintendent of the cemetery for twenty years. He took great pride in his work at the cemetery and considered it an honor to care for the plots of those who were deceased.¹⁴

Charles also made shoes for his family, as well as for others. His son, Jesse, remembered one pair of shoes his father made out of the uppers of an old pair of boots. The shoes were handed down from one child to the next and it seemed there was no 'wear out' to them.²

At the age of forty nine, Ury passed away on November 8, 1891 at South Cottonwood, Salt Lake, Utah. Ury was buried in the Murray City Cemetery, Murray, Salt Lake, Utah.¹ This was a devastating turn of events for Charles as he still had small children at home who needed to be taken care of. He did the best he could with the help of his older children and nearby family.⁵

Charles married Harriet Barrow Cox on November 14, 1894 at South Cottonwood, Salt Lake, Utah. Harriet was born March 14, 1839 at South Hampton, Hampshire, England and was the daughter of James and Elizabeth Newman Barrow.^{1, 15 note}

At the age of sixty-nine, Charles passed away on March 12, 1896, at South Cottonwood, Salt Lake, Utah. He was buried next to Ury in the cemetery he had dedicated so much of his life's work to – Murray City Cemetery, Murray, Salt Lake, Utah.¹

In his own words, Charles wrote of his belief in the Gospel and his steadfastness as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His words serve as a declaration of his faith and his testimony.

Dear mother I would be glad if you could come this season to the valley I don't know wheather the emigration will be sage or not this season but the prophet will know I am sattisfied of that Where is the individual that has his douts wheather mormonism is true or not I will put the question to myself Do I No not for one moment I jest as much believe mormonism to be true as I believe there is a god A person that embrases the gospel of Jesus Christ or mormonism if you please and subject themselves to its laws are jest as shure of salvation as the sun will shine tomorrow Well but says one But this brother dont do everything right neather does he say everything right And for this reason I dont hardly know what to make of it I scarcely know whether it is true or not

Now I here will ask a question Is there such a thing as perfection to be found among imperfect beings Let each one of us look at ourselves and I think we will find plenty of it right at home This is the reason why the lord has set in his church the various officers for the perfecting of his saints and the work of the ministry and the edifying of the body of Christ ontill we all come into the unity of the faith Who cannot see that the prophesies are fulfilling as fast as time can bring it about And it behoves us as latterday saints to be faithful to our covenants that we might not share the same fate as the ongodly⁹

The family of Charles and Ury Wilkins were left to build upon the lessons their parents had taught them; hard work, integrity, service and a determination to follow your conscience and do what is right. Their children's productive lives were a reflection of the quality characteristics Charles had always exhibited. Charles was remembered as being an exemplar father, a devoted husband and an ever faithful leader in his community and in the Church.

1 Family History Records in the possession of Karla Knapp Oswald. Dates, locations and other vital facts have been compared to and verified with records preserved within the FamilySearch data base maintained by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints available at FamilySearch.org.

2 Wilkins Reunion Committee, *"History of Charles Wilkins, Jr."*, compiled and edited August 1994. Some of the information from this booklet has been incorporated into this life sketch where noted.

Note: Records have not been found to determine when Charles and Elizabeth Wilkins traveled west nor with which wagon train. The following note is found on the official website for Mormon Overland Travel under Unknown Companies: "Charles and his daughter Lillian came to Utah between 1852 and 1857. They likely came in 1852. But the first documentation to place them in Utah is the birth of a child in October 1857. Further research is needed to narrow the year of their travel." The Job Welch family spoken of in this life sketch is also listed in Unknown Companies

<http://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/pioneerDetail?lang=eng&pioneerId=60444>

3 Mormon Migration, Liverpool to New Orleans 8 Jan 1851 – 14 Mar 1851

http://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/Search/showDetails/db:MM_MII/t:voyage/id:120/keywords:ellen

4 Mormon Migration, Liverpool to New Orleans 4 Sep 1850 – 1 Nov 1850

http://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/Search/showDetails/db:MM_MII/t:voyage/id:306/keywords:John+J+Boyd#.VDVRsmwqIOs.email

5 Eva Lina Judd Wilkins, *"History of Charles Wilkins, Jr."* (original). This original history included factual family information and stories obtained from documents and personal knowledge of family members. Some of this information has been incorporated into this life sketch where noted.

- 6 Mormon Migration, Liverpool to New York 23 Apr 1862 – 1 Jun 1862
http://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/Search/showDetails/db:MM_MII/t:voyage/id:198/keywords:john+sutton
- 7 Elizabeth Wilkins Steadman, *Letters of Elizabeth Wilkins Steadman* - Five letters written by Elizabeth to her mother, Jane Rixon Wilkins. The letters were written to Jane while she was still living in England. Letter dated June 24th (1862). Brief summary of her journey west inserted after letter.
- 8 Charles Wilkins, Jr., *Letters to Mother* - Three letters Charles wrote to his mother, Jane Rixon Wilkins, while she was living in England. Letter addressed - South Cottonwood Ward, Great S. L. Co. Utah Territory, July 2, 186(?).
- 9 Wilkins, Letter addressed – South Cottonwood Ward, Jan 12 1863
- 10 Wilkins, Letter addressed – South Cottonwood Ward G.S.L. Utah Terrt, Feb 14eth 1866
- 11 Mormon Migration, Liverpool to New York 23 May 1866 – 5 Jul 1866
http://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/Search/showDetails/db:MM_MII/t:voyage/id:21
- 12 Steadman, Letter believed to have been written in 1864.
- 13 Year 1870; Census Place: South Cottonwood, Salt Lake, Utah Territory; Roll: M593_1611; Page 521A; Image: 389; Family History Library Film: 553110.
- 14 Murray City Utah, City Cemetery, “*Planning the Cemetery*”
<http://www.murray.utah.gov/index.aspx?NID=187>
- 15 *Note:* Wilkins, Harriet Barrow Cox survived Charles Wilkins, Jr. Harriet passed away July 10, 1923 at Union, Salt Lake County, Utah and was buried in the Murray City Cemetery, Murray, Salt Lake County, Utah – Find A Grave, Harriet Barrow (Cox) Wilkins, Memorial 128418 <http://www.findagrave.com>

Note: The original photograph of Charles Wilkins Jr., used in this life sketch was donated to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints History Department by V. Arlen Oswald, great grandson of Charles Wilkins Jr., in April 2012. The History Department restored and digitized the original photograph in an effort to preserve it. The attached photograph is a copy of the restored, digitized and preserved original.

“A Life Sketch of Charles Wilkins, Jr.” was compiled by Karla Knapp Oswald - revised November 2014