

DAVID ROBISON

1827 - 1907

(Compiled from other family histories and the archives in Salt Lake City, Utah)

by LaVirda Robison Stuchser

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David Robison was born April 1, 1827 at Harrisburg, Franklin County, Pennsylvania. His father was Alexander Robison and his mother was Nancy Ellen Wagaman Robison. There were eleven children in the family - namely: Nancy, Hannah, David, William, Daniel, Catherine, Eliza, Leanna, Franey, Ephraim and Mary Ann. David's father was a farmer in Pennsylvania near Tomstown, Franklin County, Pennsylvania which is located in the far south central part of the state, about twenty five miles west of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

When David was 21 years old he married a beautiful young woman who was 18 years old at the time. Her name was Judith Smith. She was born at Harrisburg, Franklin County, Pennsylvania on July 31, 1830. Her parents were Conrad Smith and Ann Elisabeth Gusoman. She was only permitted to live with her husband, David, upon this earth for a short time. On the 22nd day of February 1849 God called her home, taking her new baby that was born on that day with her. This was a terrible tragedy in David's life and his grief was almost more than he could bear.

In 1850 David married Eliza Wagaman. She had previously been married to Peter Knepper. To this union four beautiful children were born but three of them were only permitted to live a very short time. They were all born at Harrisburg, Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Twin babies, William Alexander and Nancy Jane, were born August 1, 1851. William Alexander died on August 17, 1871. Mary Alice was born March 24, 1853, she lived a little over a year (died June 24, 1854). On April 14, 1855 Jacob Nephi was born. He died on September 16, 1857. All four of the children born to David Robison and Eliza Wagaman were sealed to their mother and her first husband, Peter Knepper, by proxy on March 18, 1948 in the Salt Lake City temple. This sealing was approved by Joseph Fielding Smith. Nancy Jane, the lone survivor, was nearly 48 years old when she died July 5, 1898. She had married Samuel Irvin Avey on October 18, 1870. Her baptism was done for her by proxy June 20, 1947 and her endowment was done September 19, 1947.

At the age of 26, David was taught the Gospel of Jesus Christ and on December 22, 1853 he was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He had a strong testimony of the gospel and knew in his heart that it was true. However, great was his sadness when his wife, Eliza, would not hear the missionaries so he left her behind and along with his father's family began the journey westward on May 7, 1860. After so much tragedy in David's life, this must have been a very hard decision for him to make. David had been a member of the Church seven years when they began the westward trek. His father and mother, Alexander and Nancy Ellen had been baptized in 1854.

Leaving all their worldly possessions behind, they traveled by rail and water for the first 2000 miles of their journey. As they were nearing Niagara Falls, just across the line into Canada, David's brother Daniel's little eight-year-old girl died. As they were traveling under contract the train was not permitted to stop and little Agnes was carried away by a Negro porter and buried, they knew not where. This must have been a very hard experience for all of them.

The Robison family arrived at Florence, Nebraska on May 16, 1860 and spent two weeks there getting ready to depart with the Charles Rich Handcart Company. This was the 9th or next to the last hand cart company to cross the plains. It was here that Daniel lost another child, little Johnny, age three. Great was this family's sorrow.

Daniel Robison, brother of David, was appointed Captain of the Company which consisted of 233 people, 43 carts, 10 tents, 6 wagons and 38 oxen. The wagon boxes and carts were painted beautifully and had bows over the top which were covered with canvas. The tongue of the carts had a crosspiece two and a half feet long fastened to the end. Two persons could lean their weight against this cross piece - this they called pushing instead of pulling. It was common to see young girls with a harness on their shoulders in the shape of a halter with a small chain fastened to it which was then fastened to the cart.

When the call came to "team up" the six teams and wagons were put in the lead. The hand carts were in the rear. There were usually four or five people to a cart - some pushing - some pulling all day long through the hot, dry sand, even though there was scarcely enough food for them to eat to keep life in their bodies. When they camped at night the carts and wagons were placed in a circle leaving an open space of about ten feet. This circle was used as a corral to unyoke the oxen. Then the oxen were driven a short distance from camp where they could find feed. Here they were guarded by men who could take turns during the night. In the morning each man yoked up his own oxen. Breakfast was hurriedly eaten and they were lined up for another day on the trail. Their carts were loaded with cooking utensils

and had water bags dangling from the sides.

Sometimes the little children were put on the carts when their feet had gotten too tired to walk any farther. Most of the mothers trudged along on the scorching ground barefooted. Some carried young babies, others leading barefoot little children by the hand. Only their prayers and the knowledge that they would soon be to Zion kept them going through those long, hot, dusty miles. They often felt a kinship to the children of Israel who wandered in the desert looking and waiting for the Promised Land.

When they camped for the night they always had prayer and sang songs. They seemed very happy putting their trust in the Lord. Several bands of Indians passed their camp but they were not molested.

At one time their provisions failed to reach camp so Captain Daniel swam the Platt River and made arrangements for provisions to be sent. The provisions were weighed out to each family once a week. At one time they were rationed one-half pound of flour a day. Water at times was very scarce and on some occasions the only water to be had was in boggy places. Sometimes they would dig three or four feet deep to strike water and then find it to be very yellow from the alkali soil.

When they arrived at the Sweetwater River they found it to be abundant with fish. Everyone had all they could eat. This was indeed a treat after eating salty bacon all along the way. They see few animals they could kill except for an occasional rabbit that would feed only one family.

After crossing the Green River in Wyoming, they ran very low on provisions. They became weak with hunger but did not become discouraged or lose faith. They had pledged themselves with the Lord and would not think otherwise than that the Lord would provide. As they were fighting against despair and hunger, a wagon drove up loaded with provisions. This proved to them that they had not put themselves in the Lord's care in vain.

They camped at the mouth of Echo Canyon on the Weber River at a small town called Henefer. Mr. Henefer donated five bushel of potatoes to the weary travelers if they would dig them. They camped there for two days and got a much needed rest.

They also stopped a few miles out of Salt Lake to clean up. They boiled their clothes and ironed them and polished their shoes to wear into Salt Lake City. The endless miles of walking barefoot had made their shoes so tight they could scarcely hobble, but they all walked into Salt Lake City August 27, 1860 pulling their handcarts. An account of the arrival of the Daniel Robison Handcart Company is recorded in the Journal History August 27, 1860 as follows:

Captain Daniel Robison's Handcart Company Arrived in Salt Lake City August 27, 1860

The first handcart company of the season left Florence, Nebraska June 6, 1860 in charge of Capt. Daniel Robison. The company was chiefly composed of British Saints with a few families from the Eastern States, in all 233 souls who traveled with 6 wagons, 43 handcarts, 38 oxen and 10 tents.

On the journey across the plains some sickness prevailed, and one child, two years old died. During the first two weeks after leaving Florence, the emigrants were exposed to drenching showers, but throughout the remainder of the journey they had excellent weather.

They arrived in the Great Salt Lake City on Sunday afternoon, August 27th. As soon as the company emerged from the canyon their friends began to gather and by the time they reached the Eighth Ward Square, thousands of citizens were assembled to greet them. Capt. Ballo and his band were there and enlivened the scene with excellent music.

Already a supply of fruit, vegetables and other edibles had been brought to the camp ground by Presiding Bishop Hunter and several ward bishops and a hearty welcome was accorded the weary travelers.

While many in the company had family and friends there to meet them, there was no one there to meet the "Robison Family". Ephraim writes: "I couldn't blame them for that as we were too hard-looking to be noticed." They indeed were poorly clad, tired and worn out.

Everything they had used on the trip belonged to the Church - wagons, carts, tents and oxen were all turned over to the church. The Robison family were left with no relatives, no friends and no anything. Brigham young once made the statement that "Anyone that came through with a hand cart company should get a straight ticket to heaven". They truly had earned it.

David had walked every step of the way and now he had practically nothing to start life anew in Zion. However, he was just 33 years old, ambitious, and hard-working. He soon set about to get food and shelter for the winter that lay ahead. He worked on shares for food and he also hauled

wood from the canyon on the same basis.

He soon moved from Salt Lake City to Farmington, Utah and then from there to North Morgan where he taught school. He was the first of his family to go to Morgan.

In Morgan he boarded with a widow, Mary Elizabeth Grover Simmons. Her husband William Simmons had been called to defend the saints from Johnson's Army and he had been accidentally shot by a member of his own company, in September 1857. Mary Elizabeth Grover Simmons was left with four children and was expecting another.

On December 26, 1860 David married Mary Elizabeth Grover Simmons in North Morgan, Morgan County, Utah. Nine children were born to this union. They were: David, Emma Jane, Thomas, Heber C., Emiline, Caroline, Charles, Eliza Ann and Joel Grover.

The first cabins in Morgan, Utah were built of small pole logs and wheat grass was used for the roof. Chimneys were built of rock. The cabins had only one small window without a glass. The cabins had dirt floors and a quilt or carpet was hung in place of a door. Beds were made of poles. Chairs were made from blocks of wood with holes bored in the bottom and round sticks put in for legs. Tallow candles were used for lights. All cooking was done over the fireplace as few stoves were to be had. Life was very hard as all food must be raised and all their clothes made by hand. But David and Mary were both very industrious and their great love for the gospel and their strong testimonies helped them through those hard times.

As polygamy was practiced by a chosen few, on March 29, 1872 David married another wife, Johanna Fredricka Kalvelstrom. She was born July 4, 1848 at Gardham, Elfvbart, Sweden, to Jonas Johansson Kalvelstrom and Anna Britta Anderson or Olofsson. She was the only member of her family to join the church in Sweden. She was baptized on October 7, 1866. Johanna was 18 years old when she joined the church. She worked for a family named Brink as a maid and governess for their children. When they immigrated to America she came with them to Utah. She was a tall, very quiet woman and a wonderful seamstress.

I have heard it told that she met David when he came to the shop where she was working to be fitted for a new suit. James Alfred Robison, one of her sons also recalled that his mother made his wedding suit. Johanna and David were married in the old Endowment House in Salt Lake City. She was 24 years old and David was 45. Six children were born to this union: Moroni, George Q., James Alfred (known as Fred), Effie Sophia, Annie and Ivan Oscar. The first four of their children were born in Morgan, Utah. Annie was born in Star Valley, Wyoming, and Ivan Oscar in Lyman, Idaho.

The two families lived close together and Mary's children loved Johanna as much as their own mother. In 1879 the family moved to Star Valley, Wyoming and bought a cattle ranch. Mary moved into the nearest town so her children could attend school. Johanna was left on the ranch to care for the crops and the cattle. She made butter and sold it to the cattle drivers' cooks when they bedded their herds down near by at night. She was often given calves that were born during the night that were too weak to travel. In this way she built up quite a herd of her own.

David wanted to move to Idaho and as everything was shared equally by the two families Johanna's cattle were sold to pay expenses for the trip. They moved to Greys Lake, Idaho in June of 1882. The winter was bitter cold with lots of snow drifts. Their supplies became exhausted and there was nothing left for them to eat. They had been using meager supplies in hopes of holding out until the weather would break.

On April 2, 1883, David went to Afton, Wyoming on snow shoes and packed two sacks of flour, one on each shoulder all the way back home to his starving family. I can imagine the eager anxious faces on his family when he returned safely with food.

Two years later in 1884 the family was uprooted again - this time they moved to Lyman, Idaho,

