A Tribute to Thomas X. Smith

*By Quinton Harris*

HISTORY OF THOMAS X SMITH & GEORGE WILLIAM SMITH

LIFE IN GREAT BRITAIN

George Smith, the father of Thomas X and George William was born in the south of England at Stanbridge, Bedfordshire, England, near Eaton Bray. Many generations of Smiths had lived in Bedfordshire for a long time. His wife, Patience Timpson, was born at Marsworth, Buckinghamshire, not far away. George and patience were married Christmas Day in 1812 at St. Mary’s Church in Eaton Bray. George was a farmer and his wife worked as a school mistress teaching the young children.

George and Patience had nine children, seven boys and two girls. George William was the 5th and Thomas was the 7th child. The first five children were all christened at the Wesleyan Methodist Church at Eaton Bray. Thomas was born on his parent’s wedding anniversary, 25 December, 1828 at Stanbridge. When he was a young man he learned the profession of braiding straw for making fine hats. The straw in Bedfordshire was especially good for making hats. While working in the hat factory, Thomas met his future wife, Margaret Gurney, who put the ribbons on the hats. Girls usually started that work at age 5.

George William was the first in the family to come in contact with the L.D.S. Church, which was flourishing in Edlesborough, a suburb of Eaton Bray, and was baptized on October 29, 1848, at 25 years old. His wife, Catherine Wooten, was baptized on December 14, 1848. Thomas was influenced by his brother George William and was baptized April 17, 1849 by John Mead, and confirmed by Benjamin Johnson, the branch president of Edlesborough. His brother, Reuben, joined the Church a month later on May 16, 1849, but he never came to Utah.

Just as many others before them, they were rejected by many of their neighbors, friends, and family members. A short time later Thomas was made the president of the small branch that had sprouted in Eaton Bray. Margaret Gurney was baptized on October 7, 1850, and they were married at Eaton Bray on January 2, 1851. Their home was on High Street. A year later their first child, Lucy, was born (January 5, 1852). At the next General Conference, the leaders of the Church issued their seventh “General Epistle” and called the Saints to “come home to Zion” and complete the “American gathering.”

Even though they didn’t have enough funds, Thomas and Margaret decided to respond to the call and go to Utah to be with the gathering Saints. They could take just a few necessities. They left from Liverpool on the ship “Falcon” in March 25, 1853 (Thomas being 24 and Margaret 22). None of their family would see them off because of the Church. The boat trip was extremely difficult and Lucy had a hard time learning to walk. The Perpetual Emigration Fund had been established to help those in need. They took advantage of it and 6 years later were able to pay back the loan of $57. They arrived in New Orleans on May 18th and boarded a river boat up the Mississippi to St. Louis, where they fitted out their wagon for the journey across the plains. On June 15th they set out in the Appleton M. Harmon Company, consisting of 60 teams. Thomas had no experience driving a team of oxen, but became quite skilled. After crossing the Notawa River and going 18 miles beyond, their 2nd son (Orson) was born in western Iowa, Just a day’s trip from Kanesville. He was born at 3 a.m. on July 4th in the back of the covered wagon. They had to delay their trip a couple of days, but soon caught up with the others in Council Bluffs. They arrived in Salt Lake Valley on October 16, 1853.

George William and Catherine had three children, so delayed their departure until April, 1855. They took the ship the “Clara Wheeler”arriving in New Orleans 2 ½ months later, and arriving at Council Bluffs on July 17, 1855. After making quick preparations they left in the Milo Andrus Company on August 4th and arrived in Salt Lake City on October 24, 1855. They settled just south of Thomas in Farmington, so were able to help each other out.

LIFE IN UTAH

Friends and strangers were very helpful during that difficult first winter while they lived in Salt Lake. They ate native greens, sego roots, and wild potatoes that were found in the bottom lands. They found that work was more available in Farmington, further north, so they moved, buying an acre of land on which he built an adobe house, 16 x 20 feet with a fireplace at one end, a door, and a window on the south to let in the light. The floor was dirt and the roof just wooden boards. This was a far cry from the one they had left in England, but they were grateful to be with the Saints. Thomas soon learned to farm, raise animals, build and make up in hard work and perseverance. Food was still scarce for a number of years.

Margaret was quite ill for several weeks after the delivery, but soon learned how to cook on an open fire and use a bake oven. Thomas found many others with the name Thomas so he added the “X” to his name. Even though times were hard, he “knew that the Lord was with us.” He found work with Dr. Willard Richards operating grist and saw mills. Dr. Richards died a year later, but Thomas had gained much from that experience that helped him in later years.

James Gurney was born on June 25, 1855, but a year later he fell into the fire in the fireplace and died from the severe burn. On November 15th Thomas and Margaret went to Salt Lake City and took out their endowments and were sealed by Brigham Young. This was a very happy time for them. On January 29, 1857 Thomas Edwin was born. He had a similar accident as his brother James, but he survived the burn until he was 16 and then died from its effects and heart trouble.

In 1857, Pres. James Buchanan received biased and false reports from government officials stationed in Utah, and the U.S. Secretary of War signed an order commanding Brigadier General Harney at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to take an expeditionary force of over 15,000 men to Utah and put down the “Mormon Rebellion.” He was soon replaced by Col. A. S. Johnston. This effort cost the government $15 million dollars and required 4,500 wagons, 50,000 oxen, and 4,000 miles to bring the army west.

Brigham Young mobilized the Saints and reactivated the territorial militia and Nauvoo Legion. Some men were selected to scout the oncoming army, to protect and aid the emigrating Mormons, and locate strategic points along the route for the interception of the federal troops and supplies, and to harass their movement. Thomas X Smith was among this group to be called out as scouts. He spent most of his time on the heights above Coalville. With the onset of winter Thomas X returned home and his two oldest children rushed out to meet him, thinking he might have something for them. He kissed them, but his clothes were more ragged than theirs.

The Mormon resistance was so effective that it forced Col. Johnston to compromise with Mormon leaders. He agreed to move his army peacefully through Salt Lake City to a camp forty miles south. If they became hostile in any way, every home would be destroyed. Thomas, as had all the other Mormons, filled their homes with dry grass, kindling, and leaves, ready to burn, and moved their food and families south. They lived in a teepee for a few months, but as the army obeyed the decision they were soon able to return back to their homes. On the trail south, the parents noted that their pig was missing. On returning back to find it, they also found that Orson had fallen out also, and had hold of the pig. When the army went through Salt Lake City, not a person was to be found, and they noted that the Mormons meant what they said.

Since the army needed supplies the Saints sold their fresh produce and harvests at a very reasonable price, and the army’s presence was a blessing in disguise. It provided money for the Saints. As the Civil War broke out, Camp Williams, as the army’s camp was called, was evacuated.

In the spring of 1959, Thomas was called to go to Cache Valley to help settle it. The original pioneers had settled in Wellsville. Another of my ancestors had settled in Smithfield, but because of the threat of Indians had moved to the banks of the Logan River. He called the city also Logan. Thomas spent the summer building a log cabin and prepared to move his family up there. While he was away his wife delivered another son on June 5, 1959, that they named Frederic. The next summer (1860) he moved the family to Cache Valley, putting the wagon box at the east end of the house for a bedroom for the children. In his history Orson states that he got his first pair of shoes after the first winter there.

On August 19, 1861, Catherine was born and on October 19, 1863, another daughter, Emma, entered the family. In 1962, the two oldest children started school. In 1863 the family moved to Second North and First East to another log house. The soil was much better there and the harvests were abundant. However, grasshoppers for ten years were a real scourge. Trenches were dug and filled with straw to burn them. Also canals were dug and rollers would be used to crush them as they flowed down stream.

The Indians were a constant worry to the Saints. They demanded food because the Saints were using their land. Thomas X learned how to deal with them and became a real friend. In 1865 Thomas X was called to be the bishop of the Fourth Ward and remained in that position until his death. He was ordained a High Priest and set apart by Apostle George Q. Cannon. He was a leader also in the community and helped build roads, canals, school houses, and other public buildings, including the Stake House and finally the temple. He was an Alderman for three terms, a judge for 16 years, a Justice of the peace and member of the school board. On January 22, 1866 Alice Gurney was born and on July 3, 1868, Margaret Drucilla joined the family.

On January 19, 1869, Thomas X married his second wife and had eleven children with Ann Masters Howe. She was born in England and emigrated also to Utah. It took three cold days to travel to Salt Lake City for the ceremony in the Endowment House. Her family was close friends with Elder Moses Thatcher in England, and she came to Logan to live with them and attend school.

In 1877, the construction of the Logan temple was commenced. Thomas X’s saw mill in Logan Canyon was a real boon to this project and the building of homes in the city. In 1880, Thomas attended general conference and was called from the stand to serve a mission in England. This gave him an opportunity to visit his family, but none of them joined the Church. He served as President of the Manchester Conference and during that time his first wife, Margaret, became ill and passed away. Since there was nothing that he could do, he remained in England until his mission was completed. Ann was a big help in caring for his first family.

When Thomas X returned home, the U.S. Government had passed laws that made it very difficult for polygamists. He helped his son, Orson, on certain projects, and went to Canada to help colonize it, to avoid the persecution and problems that Federal Marshalls and bounty hunters dealt.

He brought with him from the East another woman who became his third wife—Elizabeth Fullerton Sweet, who had 4 children by a first husband who died in 1864 before she emigrated from England. They were married and sealed in the Logan Temple on July 18, 1884, shortly after its dedication. All of her children were subsequently sealed to Thomas X and Elizabeth.

Thomas X had a severe stroke a month before he passed away on January 1, 1907 at 1 hour after midnight of the new year. His posterity was the wealth that he left behind. With the three wives he had 26 children. What a heritage.