

LIFE OF THOMAS WILLIAM WHITAKER

Thomas William Whitaker son of Thomas James and Mary Betts Whitaker was born May 16, 1822 at Rotherhither, Surrey, England. He always said laughingly, "My father had two daughters and one fine son,"

An oil painting, still in the possession of the, family, shows his mother as a golden-haired, blue-eyed lady with a lovely clear complexion, which is so characteristic of the English women. She died when he was 16 year's of age, and after this home never seemed the same to him. The counsels and teachings he received there were as seeds sown In rich soil, for as he matured, they grew stronger, ever inspiring him with zeal and favor of the right. This was one of his characteristics throughout life. His father Thomas Whitaker, was a government inspector of wines. One of his father's brothers was a government secretary; another brother was an elder in the Church of England.

Both parents were members of the Church of England, and were very devout in their belief. He was baptized as a member of that church when an infant, but it never seemed to satisfy him, though he was a naturally religious man. In later life religion was his philosophy.

Through the adventurous tales related to him of the sea by his brother-in-law, he was filled with the desire to see for himself what was going on in the world. This desire was soon gratified, for he sailed under the command of his brother-in-law on a long voyage to the South Sea Islands. For eleven years he followed this vocation and studied navigation, ship-building and cabinet-making, at which he became expert. It was his privilege to circumnavigate the globe three times, going so far north as to be in the darkness for five months. He became inured to all the hardships incidental thereto. In these days the men were made of steel and the boats were made of wood. He owned a grove of orange, lime and lemon trees in the Society Islands, the deeds of which are still in the possession of the family. He said that if it were ever the privilege of any of his family to be called on a mission there, he wished them to take these deeds,

Early in 1849 when he was 27 years of age, he came to California, attracted by its great resources. He made California his home and commenced work as a joiner and builder. He also made "cradles", used by the miners as gold washing machines, which were in great demand at the time. He received \$16.00 each for them, and as he could make one in a day, he was soon independent—this was a bonanza to him.

Through Thomas Grauard, Amasa Lyman and Charles C. Rich, he first heard the gospel. Being greatly impressed and open to conviction, he was converted to the faith on Aug. 12, 1849, and on Sept.. 16th of the same year, he was made a member by being baptized by Seth Langton; and ordained an elder not long after in the same year.

He was called to go on a mission to the Society Islands in the year 1849 in company of Bro. Grauard, James Brown and others, and was there two years. In his "Journal", he says, "In consequence of my having a knowledge of the Tahitian language and being conversant with several others, I was sent to those. Islands. I taught the language to the other Latter-Day Saint Elders and translated some pamphlets and some other church works into the Tahitian language. I was kept very busy, as I also built boats to carry the elders from one island to another. I took \$2 or \$3,000,00 with me, not having anyone with which to leave it at the time,"

He also built boats for the natives for traffic among the Islands. Later he built a vessel for transferring church and other traffic, and manned by Bro. Grauard with T. W. Whitaker as captain. His mission met with little success, but he said if he had touched but one human heart, he had not labored in vain, At that time the French Government was in possession of the Islands and were strenuously opposed to any other religion but Catholicism. Elder Whitaker was in prison four days and tried for preaching. Nothing was found against him, so he was set

at liberty.

{Note from the webmaster three accounts about the next paragraph: ---

- (1) According to www.familysearch.org, the little native girl mentioned in the next paragraph, named Anne, was born 14 Feb 1848. (Note that Thomas Wm Whitaker was sent on his mission for his second trip to Tahiti after that date.) Her mother was Tuana Tautipi. Her father was (according to www.familysearch.org) Thomas William Whitaker. The mother died of smallpox soon after the little girl was born.
- (2) But --- according to Bette Brown Fuller on tracingthefamily.blogspot.com, '-----Reading the book "The Biography of Elizabeth Mills Oakden Whitaker (available on microfilm from familysearch.org)", "I found substantiating evidence that Anne was not the biological daughter of Thomas Whitaker. Thomas Whitaker did marry Annie's mother when he resided in Tahiti, however she had been married prior to a Tahitian (whose surname was Tautipi, and who died) and Annie was a child of that marriage. Annie's mother, Tuana Tautipi died while she and Thomas were living in Tahiti. When Thomas returned to the United States he brought Tuana's daughter, Annie with him.----'.
- (3) However, the most accurate account may be in a DVD from the Whittier Museum in Centerville Utah, which states that Tuana came to California with Thomas and Annie. Then Tuana, anxious about the cold weather in the Salt Lake Valley, returned to Tahiti and was never heard from again.}

He brought home with him one of the little native girls, who was two or three years of age. Her parents had embraced the gospel and were baptized. They contracted small pox during an epidemic. The father died, and there was little hope for the recovery of the mother, so she desired the elders to bring her daughter to Zion to be brought up among the Latter-Day Saints, The mother asked Elder Whitaker if he would be her guardian. (She was as one of the family until she married Alfred Slater as his plural wife at the age of 20. They made their home in Huntsville and raised a large family.)

Elder Whitaker considered himself as doing missionary work when he built homes in San Bernardino for Amasa Lyman, and G. C. Rich. While so engaged, he labored without wage. He loved those men, and after said, "I can never repay them for bringing the gospel to me. True loyalty often calls for sacrifice, and the test must sometimes be made."

In 1856 he was called by Bro. Rich to leave California and go to Salt Lake to look after his families and interests. So later in that same year, through the southern part of the country, a pioneer mule pack train wound its weary way into the Salt Lake Valley to help subdue and conquer the wilds of the west. These people were striving to build a better world where they could live their religion. Man is a naturally religious being, the heart instinctively seeks for a God. Sometimes we find honest doubters among us whose sincerity we recognize and respect, but as father often said, "this is an individual work and our mission is to help others."

Thomas had been here but a short time when he was summoned, along with Wm. Cleveland, Wm. Ford, Joel Parrish, Stuben Rollins, Jessie Cherry and Joseph Cherry, to go out and meet the Johnson's Army, then stationed at Green River. These young men were ordered to Echo Canyon to pile up rock on the sides of the canyon so they could roll them down on the soldiers, and also pile rocks in the canyon so they would not pass. Pres. Young, being Governor of the Utah Territory got the government to sign a treaty so that if the army did come through, they would have to march on to Camp Floyd. Older men with families were called to go out south, leaving a few young men to set fire to everything in case Johnson's Army came in, trying to take possession.

Not long after his arrival he met Elizabeth Oakden, a young widow with a little son. Their courtship was of short duration. At first, she hesitated to accept his offer of marriage because of her child, but he assured her that he would be so good and kind to the little boy that she could not help but love him. She was making her home with her father's brother, Wm. G. Wills at the time; he would always encourage her to marry this young man, as he would make a kind father to the little boy and be a loving husband. He spoke kindly and encouraged her, saying, "There are better days ahead for you, Elizabeth. It was never meant for you to feel so gloomy, living a life without a companion, as you are doing. There is yet a future in store for you and a great deal of pleasure."

On Sept. 4th they were married. Pres. Young performed the ceremony in his office. Later they were married in the Endowment House and went afterwards to her uncle's home for a wedding supper. Coming back to Centerville on Sept. 16th, they first lived with Bro. and Sister John Porter, Sr., where the home of the late Joseph Smith now stands. They stayed with them about three weeks, sleeping in their own wagon at nights. They always spoke of these people as a model couple and Sister Porter as among the best of cooks and housekeepers, an example to all who came her way.

Before the "move", father purchased some land from Bro. Thomas Thurston. The old fort wall joined it along the north. (Later, blackberry vines covered what was left of it.) For their first home they bought a log cabin from Thomas Ricks, who at that time owned the land where it stood (which later became the property of the Waddoups family). Father moved the cabin to his own property and rebuilt it with the front facing the west. White sand and clay were used as mortar to chink it up, and wire grass to bind it together. He built a little window in the east, also a loft above, to be used as a store room. The fireplace in the north end of the house was built of adobes made of the same clay with which the logs were chinked together, and the chimney was made of the same clay mud. There were wooden molds to shape these adobes, which were sometimes called sun-dried brick. They were ready to put in the building as soon as they were dried.

The fireplace played an important part in the home. It was built wide enough at the bottom to allow space for a hob (a flat space on each side where things were placed to keep warm. This was plastered on the sides with the same clay mud), There were cranes fastened on the side, so they could swing back and forth as the heat suggested. They had to make their own andirons, or "dogs" to support the wood.

They labored hard for several weeks to finish the home before winter set in. After the home was finished, the next consideration was the furniture. In this, his knowledge of carpentry served him well. From raw timber he built a cupboard, table, chairs, and a bedstead. With his pocket knife and a home-made turning lathe, he carved the bed posts, table legs and chairs, and polished them smooth.

They began clearing the land of scrub-oak, rabbit-brush, and sage brush. The farm measured about 5 or 6 acres. When folks asked him why he did not take up more land, he would say, "What is property in comparison with a chance to be unselfish? Other people coming in might want to settle here. Live and let live." This was always his motto.

He planted most of this land in berries, shrubs, flowers, and fruit trees. He was the first nursery-man in Davis County. Trees he sold to Charles Duncan are still bearing fruit. He also planted mulberry trees to use their leaves in feeding silk worms; the eggs for which he had previously sent to London, for his father to send to him. Elizabeth made a silk scarf from the

first silk, leaving it the natural color, and presented it to Pros. Young. He seemed so enthusiastic over the venture he came out to see them and persuaded her to make him a vest like the scarf. He asked Bro. and Sister Whitaker if they would go into the silk industry, but not having the money to finance it, they were unable to do so and gave up the idea.

As time rolled on the Black Hawk War broke out, and Thomas was again called to be in readiness, but the war came to an end before he reached headquarters. His sword, middlegun and uniform are among his effects.

The first baby born to this union was a boy whom they named Samuel Thomas. Two years later when a little girl came, they named her Emily. Nine other children followed in rapid succession, and as they came along, they were each loved and welcomed.

As the family increased they needed to have more room. Near this log house, a little to the west, Thomas built an eight-room house of adobe with a cellar underneath. This house faced the south. The windows were made of small panes of colored glass, surrounding a large pane of clear glass. The windows were on either side of a double door in the front part of the house. Later, when they could afford it, he started a porch along the front. When it neared completion, it was struck by lightning, almost destroyed and never finished. Later this same house caught fire in the roof, when only mother and the small children were there to put it out, and water had to be carried in buckets up a ladder. Sister Josephine was sent to find her father, and as he was rather a nervous man, mother said to be careful how she told him. When he asked her what the trouble was, she said, "Oh, nothing, only the house is on fire." At that he was home in a bound.

After he and Elizabeth had been married ten years, he met Hannah Waddoups, a young girl who was attending his school of penmanship. Thomas and Elizabeth talked the question of polygamy over, and it was agreed that he enter into the order of plural marriage. After their marriage, Hannah lived in the front part of the adobe house for two years. Thomas then built a house on the upper mountain road for her where the Coombs house now stands. After a time he sold this place to Samuel Capener. He built a home for Hannah a short distance east of Elizabeth's house where she lived until her death. She was a splendid wife and mother, ever teaching her children to do right and never neglecting her duty to them. After the death of her husband, she would gather her little flock around her and teach them gospel truths. She had no easy task, as most of them were at an age when they most needed a father, but she finished her work in raising a fine family, which is a credit to her memory.

At one time Thomas Whitaker was chosen clerk of teachers and quorums and a ward teacher, which office he held for 20 years. He was a band master, and his band furnished music for dances, theaters, and other amusements. He also played the violin in the ward and with his family. As a moral and theological instructor, he set an example by his daily life, which any of us could be proud to emulate. He was a strict observer of the Word of Wisdom and said his prayers night and morning. He would no more think of missing his prayers than his meals. He was superintendent of the Centerville Sunday Schools a number of years with Fred Walton and Thos. Tingey as assistants. This office he filled with honor until he was called away from home, when he resigned his position. On Aug. 3rd he was ordained a high priest.

As time marched on, he took contracts to build churches, residences, and stores. He also built sailboats which he sailed on the Great Salt Lake and took many people on excursions over to Church Island. He rebuilt the Wells-Fargo stagecoach barn into Elk Horn Hall. He built a stage, painted the scenery, and helped coach the plays. He was architect and he did the carpentry work on the Centerville meeting house, that is now standing; a Mr. Rock from Morgan having the contract for the mason work along with Brothers Duncan and Cotterel as plasterers and stone-cutters.

He worked on the Salt Lake Temple, living in a temporary shack with Henry Cleveland and others from Centerville, They took tithing scrip as part pay, the balance in cash. He never lived to see the Temple finished.

He built homes for F. A. Sessions, A. V. Call, Thomas Steed, the Peery and Eccles homes in Ogden. He built Baptist churches in Salt Lake, Ogden, and Little Rock, Idaho,

If any of the family took sick, the first thing we thought of was to have father administer to us, as he was a man of great faith. In his home he was a very affectionate and kind father. The family always looked forward to his homecoming, as he would often bring new songs for us to learn. Some were "My Grandmother's Old Easy Chair", "Grandfather's Clock", etc. He would play on his violin, and in this way, we learned the music. As storybooks were scarce, he would tell us of his adventures, or Bible stories. We well remember dolls and other wooden toys he shaped with his turning lathe, and painted. He saw to it that we attended our organizations, was careful of the company we kept, and looked well into the family we intended to marry into. His advice and counsel had such a convincing ring that his family never doubted them. A friend (Bro. John Seaman), in speaking of him, said, "His word was his honor." He was a great reader and kept up with the history of his day, but more especially the church works. His faith never wavered, but grew stronger with each year.

He had completed his genealogy work in the Logan Temple with the exception of three names; and deeded his homes to his wives just three weeks before he died. On April 27th, 1886, he was stricken with a pain in the abdomen, caused by an over-exertion in launching a boat for Capt, Davis, which he had finished. After he felt a little easier, he went to Salt Lake on business, which he had only partly completed when the pain again grew worse. The next morning his colorful life closed. It; was not known at the time that his death was caused toy appendicitis, but was called strangulated hernia. He had always been unusually healthy, having only experienced one or two sick spells in his life. He passed away, praising and asking that his family follow his footsteps. He left a family of 22 to mourn his death and was the first of them to pass away.

Elizabeth's children

Samuel Thomas—Dec. 20, 1859
Elizabeth Emily—Aug. 24, 1861
John Mills—Oct. 12, 1863
Susan Johanna—Mar. 21, 1865
Mary Alice—Jan, 10, 1868
Joseph James—Dec. 11, 1869
Josephine—Nov. 1, 1871
Evelyn—Jan. 1, 1874
George Alma—Mar. 27, 1876-1890
Grace Mable—Aug. 27—died at 12
Walter Eugene—Aug. 10, 1881

Hannah's children

Elizabeth—May 6, 1670
Thomas W.—Dec. 7, 1873
Mary J.—Aug 2, 1872
Nephi---Aug. 4, 1875
Edwin—May 3, 1877
Wm. P.—Apr. 2, 1882
Prudence—Mar. 4, 1880
David W,—June 17, 1884

by Mary Alice Parrish