

## Brief Sketch of the Life of Wm Harrison Folsom

Pioneer of 1860

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William Harrison Folsom was born at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, March 25, 1815. At the age of 16 his father and family moved to Buffalo New York, where they established a building business and did a large amount of work at the docks.

On August 21, 1837 he married Zerviah Eliza Clark. On hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints he became convinced of the truth of it and on February 17, 1842, he, his wife, and Hannah Reese were baptized in the Niagra River. It was necessary to cut through two and half feet of ice to perform the baptisms. The following spring he went to Nauvoo where he became acquainted with the prophet Joseph Smith and worked as a carpenter and joiner on the Nauvoo Temple. In the spring of 1844 he returned to Buffalo for his family and during this journey electioneered for the Prophet Joseph Smith for President of the United States.

In the fall of 1844 he returned to Nauvoo with his family and was there during the excitement caused by the mob. He again resumed his carpenter work on the temple. During this time food was very scarce and many times he would parch corn on the stove for his dinner. Upon request he remained until the temple was completed and was present at the dedication and during this time was ordained a member of the eleventh quorum of Seventies. He took an active part in the defense of the city when it was besieged by the mob and participated in the Nauvoo battle of 1846.

When the temple was finished he left Nauvoo with several others who were in the depths of poverty camping on the Mississippi River about 3 miles below Nauvoo. Night and morning great flocks of quail came to the camp. The saints took small clubs and threw at the quail and in almost every instance killed enough to last them until the next meal.

For some time he lived at Farmington on the Des Moines River. Here he made

clothes pins and wash boards and his wife made horse nets. These were sold in exchange for provisions. The people in Farmington were very much opposed to the Mormons and often stoned their homes. One day as he was going to get some provisions a number of men who had been drinking, saw him coming and said, "Here comes a Mormon". When he reached them they asked him if he was a Mormon, to which he replied, "He didn't think it was any of their business". One of the crowd shouted, "Yes, he's a Mormon, I know him". At this, they put a rope around his neck and threw it over the awning, drawing him off his feet. Then they let him down and asked him again if he was a Mormon. He replied that he was. Again he was pulled up and hung for a short time and again let down and asked the same question. Exasperated beyond human endurance, he replied, "Yes, damn you, I am a Mormon". They again pulled the rope, this time leaving him hanging. One of the men who had not been present at the hanging was passing the spot and saw the body dangling, the tongue protruding from the mouth and the eyes set. He immediately lowered the body, took the rope from around his neck and carried the almost lifeless body across the street to the bank of the Des Moines River. When consciousness returned Brother Folsom started for home. One of the mob seeing him, ran after him and seized his coat tail, ripping it to the collar, but he succeeded in getting away.

Shortly after this attempted hanging, Wm. H. Folsom moved with his family to Keokuk, Iowa. Here he was employed by a Mr. Hughes to go to California by way of Cape Horn. This took between five and six months. During this time he was continually preaching the Gospel to the passengers. He arrived in San Francisco in 1849 and carried on the building business in Nevada City, California. He remained in California a little over two years, returning with over \$10,000 in gold including several fifty dollar octagon gold coins. He met his family at Atwater, Ohio, where his wife was visiting her parents. After a short visit among their relations, they went to Buffalo, where he spent a short time with his father, brothers, and sisters. When he was ready to go home he went to the docks to buy his ticket from Buffalo to Toledo by way of Cleveland on Lake Erie. As he pulled out his money to pay for the tickets, he suddenly felt that he

should not go but he continued to count his money. Again he hesitated and looked over the boats before buying his ticket. He returned to his father and told him he had decided to stay another day. The next morning word was received from Cleveland Ohio that the boat he had thought of going on left the Cleveland docks and was run into by another boat when about half a mile from shore, all passengers drowned except two.

The following day, he took a boat and safely arrived in Toledo continuing his journey over land to his home in Keokuk. He held the position of president of the branch in Keokuk. For two years he followed the grocery business. He then sold out and went into the building business including the raising and moving of houses. At Keokuk a four story brick hotel, through grading the street had been left five feet above the grade. He contracted to put a story under it using seventy jack screws, placing them where they would be the most useful and at the blow of a whistle each screw was turned half around and in that way the building was raised six feet and the desired story was built under it.

In 1854 he fitted himself out with three wagons, two yoke of cattle on each wagon and started for Salt Lake City, arriving at Council Bluffs ten days too late for the last company. He remained in Council Bluffs six years and carried on a contracting and building business, doing some joiner work on the Nebraska State capitol at Omaha. Here also he held the position of Branch President of the Church.

He again fitted himself with four wagons (one horse team and three ox teams) and set out for Salt Lake City and joined the Joseph W. Young Company arriving in Utah Oct 3, 1860. (Amelia rode on a riding horse. Aunt Louisa remembers her mother putting her to sleep in the wagon (she was six years old) and seeing an Indian look in and put his arm toward her. She was so frightened, she got out in a hurry. She also remembers the herds of Buffalo running along the sides of the hill.)

Shortly after his arrival he opened a carpenter shop on Main Street between First and Second South. His first job was to make some sash and sash doors for Enoch Reese. He also did some work for James Townsend at the old Townsend Hotel on West Temple and First South. In the early spring , he and his son Hyrum set to work on

the Lion House porch for Pres. Brig. Young. Joseph Schoenfield was foreman and general superintendent.

During this time Philip Margetts, Henry Bowring, his wife, and others were doing a little dramatic work, and at a special performance of the so-called "Bowring Theatre". Ninety tickets were distributed to Pres. Young, Heber C. Kimball, their families and some others they had the privilege of inviting. Among the others invited guests were Wm. H. Folsom & wife, his daughter Amelia and son Hyrum. At the close of the performance Philip Margetts came before the curtain and made a short talk in his happy way, thanking Pres Young & Pres Kimball and their families and friends for honoring them with their presence. He said he was sorry that the place was not larger so that they could have entertained more of them. Pres Young arose from where he was seated and complimented the company very highly for the splendid entertainment and said for them to go ahead and continue to make merriment for the people. He also said that in a short time he intended to build a large theater with plenty of room to entertain and amuse the entire community. It has been generally conceded that the amusement of that evening was the forerunner of the large theater, for, a few weeks later, when speaking to the Sunday Congregation he said he was going to build a big fun hall or theater where the people could go and enjoy a hearty laugh.

About this time the health of the general church architect, Truman O. Angel, began to fail and having learned of the mechanical ability of Wm. H. Folsom, Pres. Young sent for him. After some conversation he was instructed to immediately commence drawing plans for the Salt Lake Theater. The southwest room of his home was turned into an office.

At the semi-annual conference of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints which convened in the Bowery, Salt Lake City, commencing on Sunday Oct 6, 1861, Brother Wm. H. Folsom was sustained as church architect. Elder John Taylor presented the authorities of the church at the morning meeting of Oct 7<sup>th</sup> which convened at 10 A.M. at the Bowery and Wm. H. Folsom's name was given as follows:

“Wm. H. Folsom architect of the church. Elder Truman O. Angel resigned the office of architect in consequence of poor health and recommended Bro. Folsom as his successor”. (Copied from the Millennial Star vol 23 p 783, other records vol 24 inc. 29.)

Soon the plans for the Salt Lake Theater were sufficiently advanced and in the early part of the spring of 1861 excavation was commenced. The theater corner was the busiest place in Salt Lake City. Bishop John Sharp and his brother Joseph, had several ox teams unloading rock in the cellar, hauled from Red Butte canyon. The stone masons were at work laying a rock and a bowery was built near the northwest corner of the grounds where lumber was stacked. A number of carpenters, under the direction of Joseph Schofield as foreman, were busy framing the truss roof with king and queen post. This truss roof was the first of its kind built in Salt Lake City. This was also the first place where red pine pins were used in lieu of nails in pinning the planks together. Red pine logs were brought from the west mountains and crosscut, sawed off in four and a half inch lengths and then split into square pegs a full inch square. They were then smoothed and pointed and driven into half inch holes which were bored at different angles as best suited the size of the plank. The building was enclosed early in the fall and the inside work was rushed to completion. Long board seats with backs were made to seat the people. Scenery frames were made 20 ft. high from 2 x 4's. Wm. P Morris, Geo. M. Ottinger and Martin Lenzi painted the first canvasses.

When the announcement was made that the theater was ready for use, invitations were sent to church officials, the men who worked on the building, and to all state, county and city officials including their families and on March 6, 1862 the theater was dedicated. President Daniel H. Wells offering the dedicatory prayer. The building was filled to overflowing. Pres. Young addressed the audience, stating, among other things that the building was to be used for innocent amusement and fun (the people had been burdened with blood curdling tragedy and he declared against this form of amusement). President Heber C. Kimball and Apostle John Taylor followed in brief addresses on the same line and the program closed with selections from the orchestra and brass band,

concluding with the "Star Spangled Banner". An announcement was made that the theater would be opened Saturday evening March 8<sup>th</sup> and 7 P.M. when the play "The Pride of the Market" and "State Street" would be presented. Long before the time for opening crowds were at the doors waiting to get tickets. Everyone was pleased with the acting and the plays were repeated. The evening performances invariably ended with a lively farce or fun play, for Pres. Young said he wanted the people to be happy.

In order to have a variety of pleasure a floor in sections was made that covered the entire Parquet, the parquet extending over the entire lower floor at that time. It was placed on trestles making it solid and several dances were given during the winter. Twenty-six cotillions could be formed and danced on the floor. The old and young danced in the same cotillion in those happy and joyful days. The music and the prompter were located in the first circle or balcony. Wood, lumber, molasses, and in fact all kinds of produce were exchanged for theater and dance tickets.

It was the genius of the great pioneer Pres. Brigham Young that conceived the idea of the wonderful tabernacle and as Wm. H. Folsom was architect of the church at that time and had just finished the construction of the Salt Lake Theater, he was consulted. Pres. Young raising his umbrella, suggested that the roof be formed in this way but with oval ends more in the shape of a half egg inverted. The suggestion of his chief was grasped and Bro. Folsom said, "I'll do it". At Buffalo N.Y. he had worked with his father in constructing the Erie docks where much skill was required. He had also assisted his father in constructing several fine buildings in Buffalo and had raised houses and moved them. Now all these ideas were to be considered in the construction of the mammoth roof ancient architectural works were brought into requisition and among them were found many designs in structural lattice work which gave ideas that were made use of and through planning and devising, re-designing and redrawing, and constant study for about two months, he succeeded. Large nails were almost out of the question and all the nails had to be brought a thousand miles across the plains in wagons, therefore the same system of pinning the planks together was installed as had been carried on in the building of the Salt Lake Theater. The great

tabernacle was completed in 1867.

At the semiannual conference in Oct 1862, Wm. H. Folsom was ordained and sustained a member of the high council of the Salt Lake Stake of Zion. This position he occupied until May 9, 1874 when he was chosen first councilor to Geo. B Wallace (Pres of the Stake) which position he filled for a number of years. In 1871-72 he filled a short mission to the States, visiting Ohio, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Virginia, Kansas and other states.

In 1877 he was called by the church to draw plans for the Manti Temple and superintended it. He temporarily moved a part of this family to Manti where he remained until the Temple was finished and dedicated in 1888. He then returned to Salt Lake City and served two years as building inspector, during the time John Clark was Mayor.

Brother Folsom's excellent qualities of mind and heart endeared him to a host of friends and his material works stand as a monument of his skill and accuracy on both design and execution. He had full faith in the divine mission of the Latter Day Prophet and in the ultimate triumph of the cause which he introduced.

A few years before his death he was ordained a patriarch in the Salt Lake Stake of Zion, where he resided. He passed away on March 20, 1901 at the age of 86.