

BIOGRAPHICAL SCETCH OF JOSEPH THOMAS WILKINSON

1847 - 1919

Compiled and written by Charles S.  
Wilkinson

Joseph T. Wilkinson, Attorney, Educator, Tradesman, Churchman, and Farmer, who departed this life August 1919, left a posterity of ten living children and a considerable number of grandchildren and some great-grandchildren. In addition, he left many monuments of his useful and constructive life, and a reputation for always being on the side of law and order, justice and benevolence. He was an active worker in civic, religious, and industrial lines. He was born poor by honest parents in Manchester, England, March 26, 1847.

His father, Charles Wilkinson, was one of 11 sons, and his mother was Sarah Hughes Wilkinson. They were working people, trying to make a start for themselves and three children, when they became interested in a new religion being introduced in England by missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and accepted baptism and membership. Having become firmly convinced that this was the only true and vital religion, they quickly made such preparations as their circumstances afforded to make the long pilgrimage over land and sea to the Valleys of the Mountains in Utah. They disposed of the limited possessions, and on about the first of November 1855, set sail for America on the ship Emerald Isle. The group consisted of Charles Wilkinson and wife, and their three children Joseph Thomas, Sarah Jane, and Mary.

Volumes have been written and published  
convering the rigors and hard ships endured by the early Morman  
converts in getting to the gathering place of the saints in  
Utah, and few of any suffered more than this little group,  
which had been reduced to a total of three by the time they  
reached the Salt Lake Valley, and the subject of our sketch  
hovered on the brink of eternity for a number of weeks, and was

so thin and emaciated on arrival that he was an object of pity and was handed a piece of bread by a kind hearted sister who passed by as the little forlorn group stood beside the wall of the Temple block.

The two girls, Sarah Jane, and Mary, succumbed in the camp at Iowa City and were buried there. The mother, in delicate health and obliged to wade the last crossing of the Platte River in the late fall, contracted her death; but, she lived to reach the land of promise, and died a few weeks afterwards. Thus the distraught parent and his nine year old puny little son were left ~~they~~ to face life alone in the new untamed territory. Not a very happy ending for their fond and enthusiastic dream.

However, considering that practically all the settlers were in much the same circumstances, provision was made for them by the welcoming committee, and Bro. Jos. L. Heywood's family, to whom the Wilkinsons were assigned, were very kind and considerate, and not only supplied them with food and lodgings temporarily, but Sister Heywood nursed the desperately ill Mrs. Wilkinson up to the time of her death, which occurred the middle of January, 1857.

During the next few months, the boy and his father endured some trying ordeals. An example was a trek by foot from Provo to Salt Lake City through deep almost trackless snow in the month of January, and facing a cold north wind. On this occasion the subject of our sketch was face to face with death from cold and exhaustion, and escaped almost by a miracle.

In the spring of 1857, Brother Wilkinson went south to Nephi, then called Salt Creek, to farm on shares for Bro. Jos. L. Haywood. He planted a considerable acreage, but due to a grasshopper scourge, reased no crop, so was obliged to resort to his knowledge of mechanics to make a livelihood. In the Fall of the same year he married Mqss Jane Bentham, a young

lady who had come over with that season's emigrants. She was industrious, frugal, and companionable, and proved a good wife and mother to the widower and his ten year old son.

Charles Wilkinson was industrious and ambitious, and soon had constructed a modest frontier home. That same year brought the Johnson's Army to the portals of Utah, and Wilkinson responded to a call for guard duty, but was excused when it was found that sufficient patriots were already enlisted.

For a brief period the Wilkinsons were prosperous, but in the winter of 1858 calamity struck again. Jane Bentham Wilkinson died in child-birth as also did the new born son, who was christened Charles Thomas.

In January, 1862 the widower married Miss Ann Denton, late of the British Isle. They lived in Nephi for a few years, where a daughter, Rebecca Ann Wilkinson was born Dec. 20, 1863.

The family then moved to "The Muddy" (St. Thomas, Nev.) where they resided two or three years, then moved to St. George. It was there that Ann Denton Wilkinson died of Billious Fever August 5, 1866.

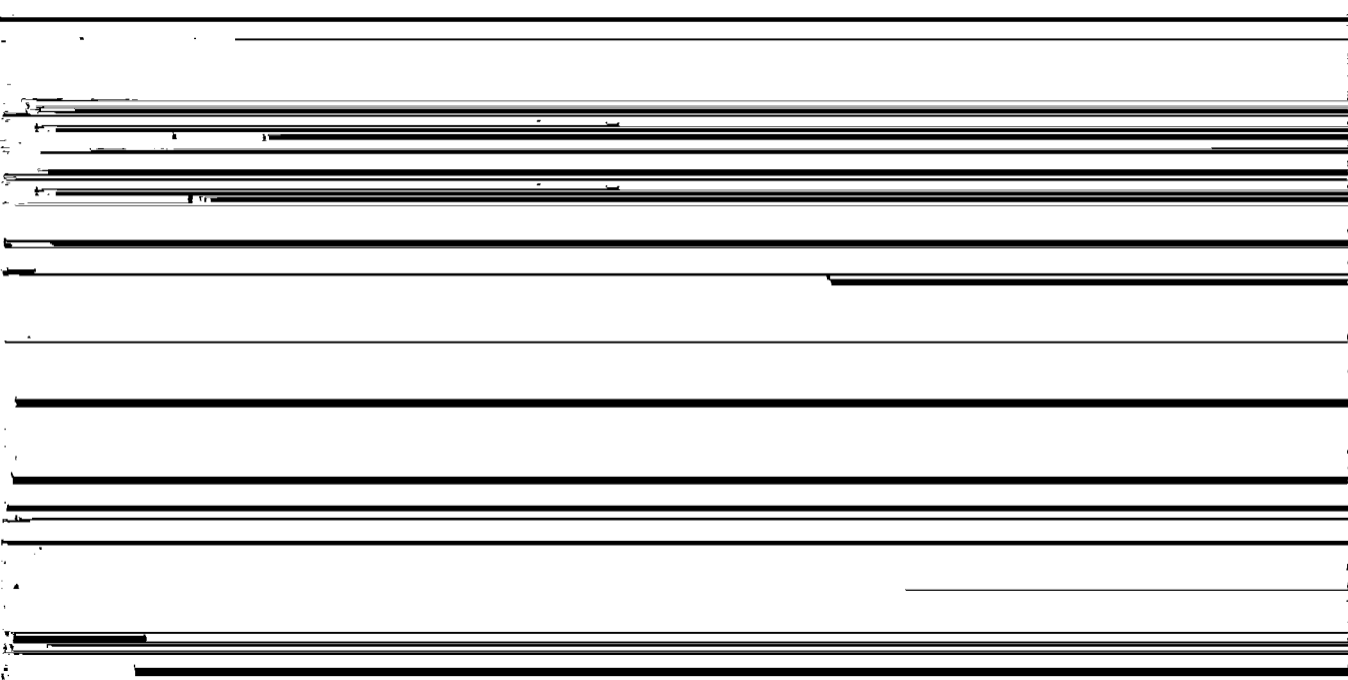
In St. George Joseph Thomas Wilkinson, who was now a young man of 21 years, courted and married Miss Elizabeth Wells, in 1868. The following year a daughter was born to the young couple, whom they named Elizabeth Emily Wilkinson.

Shortly after Joseph Thomas and family moved to Hebron (Shoal Creek) in Washington County, Utah, where they established residence, and engaged in the usual pursuits of settlers in the new country. Besides farming, teaming and trading, Joseph teamed up with members of the Crosby brothers in constructing the old Deseret Telegraph Line out to Pioche, Nev.

The family continued to reside at Hebron until 1875, and during that interval another daughter, Sarah Anna, and a son, Charles Stephen, were born to Joseph and Elizabeth. During his residence there, he was first counselor to Bishop George H. Crosby of the Hebron Ward.

From Hebron they moved to Leeds, Washington County, where Charles' Wilkinson had established his residence. And shortly after George H. Crosby was persuaded to follow. The Leeds Ward was subsequently re-organized with George H. Crosby as Bishop, and Joseph T. Wilkinson and Brigham Y. McMullen as his counselors. At Leeds, Joseph taught school, farmed a few acres of land, worked at his trade of wheelwright, helped construct three or four homes, served as justice of the peace, etc., in addition to caring for his church duties and obligations. Besides these, he was a vivacious book worm, and was considered one of the best informed men on history, ancient and modern; on theology, science, and mythology; and laid the foundation for one of the best private libraries in the Southern part of the state.

Here in Leeds, the following children were born to him: Joseph T. Jr., (Demised March 9, 1938); Mary Ann Wells, born June 26, 1880, shortly after which the mother, Elizabeth, died on July 15th and the baby died September 30th following.





to Cedar City, where better opportunities for education, etc., existed. He purchased what was known as the Neilson Place consisting of a large adobe house and considerable acreage of land situated in the Old and Union Fields, and established residence there.

Ever a devout and inthusiastic church member, he was soon active in religious as well as civil activities. One of his first offices was that of justice of the peace, a position he was wellqualified to fill after the experience he had obtained while serving at Leeds on the doorstep of Silver Reef. There he had presided at a number of important cases, some of them via a change of venue from Silver Reef courts, involving valuable property litigations. He was thus instrumental in awakining a higher regard for law and order in the fledging froitier settlement. He would tolerate no contempt of his court. He was also early inducted into Sunday School and other Church activities, being first assistant to Stake Supt. of Babbath Schools, Jos. M. Armstrong; and was first an alternate and later a regular member of the High Council of the Parowan Steke, being set apart by Apostle M. F. Cowly December 20, 1903 and served until the re-organization of the entire Stake structure in 1908, made necessary by the advanced age of the Stake President and a number of others involved.

7  
Charles T. also served as Mayor of Cedar

City during the years 1894 and 1895; and was County Attorney, during 1895 and 1896. Other ecclesiastical positions held by him included block teacher, adult Sabbath School teacher, and home missionary from time to time.

In his work as assistant Stake Superintendent of Sunday Schools, he and his chief, Brother Armstrong, were familiar visitors to all the schools of the Stake. And their sage and timely advice gave hope and encouragement to their various audiences. As previously stated, Joseph T. was a well-read man and particularly well-informed on questions of theology.

He was thoroughly conversant with not only the Bible, but with all the official works revealed by the latter-day Prophet Joseph Smith, or interpreted by him. He could therefore discourse interestingly and learnedly upon any and all theological subjects. Brothers Wilkinson and Armstrong were very warm friends, and were associated closely, not only in the Stake Sabbath School superintendency, but also as members of the High Council.

The subject of our sketch was rather small in stature, only 5 feet 6 inches in height, and weighing up to 156 pounds in the prime of his manhood. He was an efficient wheel-write, a fair blacksmith, and was at home as a carpenter and cabinet maker. He did considerable farming and teaming; he studied law and was admitted to practice in the Utah district courts before the turn of the century. He was a close friend of E. V. Higgins, who was for a time judge of the Fifth Judicial District, and received help and encouragement from the judge in his law studies and practice. He was also associated in the publication of the local newspaper, Iron County Record, with his sons and did considerable writing for the publication.

During the late years of his life, he was employed by the local electrical company as meter reader and collector, and also worked a shift at the generating plant in Coal Creek canyon, which brought him into contact with the inhabitants of Cedar City, and greatly increased his circle of friends and acquaintances. Joseph was ambitious and industrious and accomplished a lot in his lifetime of 72 years. He was a good parent; a strong disciplinarian, but just and fair in his decisions; and ever ready to acknowledge mistakes when he made them, and to make amends.

To this writer, he was as much a pal as a father.

Always ready and anxious to add to our innocent enjoyments, not

only by the wagons and others playthings which he provided,

principally by the work of his hands, but also on the playgrounds,

when teaching school, the best sport on the field; in the

SabbathSchool classes as teacher, with his crystal clear, down-to-earth interpretations and explanations of Scripture; and at home in the evening by his entertaining readings of such works as Dickens, and other well known authors, when other duties did not prevent. Result: The family was happy and contented at home, instead of being the the streets and in other dangerous environs.

Yes, Joseph Thomas Wilkinson was a fine example of intelligent parenthood. In the matter of religion, he was steadfast in his faith in the Latter-Day Saint Gospel, and extremely sclicitous that his children should follow in his footsteps; yet, he was never domineering nor dictatorial in his attitude. He conceded the right of other members of the family to their opinions and free agency. Intolerance had no place in his makeup, though he was ready and able to defend his positions and conclusions.

Punctuality was one of his specialties.

He altered the well-known proverb "Procrastination is the thief of time" to read "Procratination is the thief of the other fellow's time", and no one ever accused him of being a thief. Another of his frequent quotations was "Obediance is the first law of heaven", and " Order is the offspring". He believed that it was better to "Wear out rather than to rust out", and ordered his life accordingly.

Due to the pilgrimage of the family, commenced when he was only eight years old, and the subsequent disruption and afflictions of the household, the most of Joseph's schooling occurred before he emigrated to America. But he claimed to have read the Bible through to his mother, prior to her death. He always was a proficient reader, and certainly could be called a self-made man. He received only two or three quarters of scholastic training after coming to Utah, and part of that was some time after he was married; yet he was able to teach school proficiently in the United States.

licensed to practice in the district courts of the State. Much of the time he devoted to reading was during mealtime. He almost invariably had his book or paper at the table while eating. I am not defending the practice, I am simply recording the facts. But regardless of the effect the habit of reading at meals may have had upon his digestive organs, it certainly did contribute to his store of knowledge, which is credited with being power.

Most of the people who were contemporary during the lifetime of Joseph T. Wilkinson have also left this stage of action. But there are a few of the surviving younger generation who were intimately associated with father, and have volunteered to give their impressions of the associations.