A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF LEVI OPENSHAW

Levi Openshaw was the youngest son of William Openshaw and Ann Greenhalgh Openshaw. He had three brothers older and three sisters younger than he. He was born February 2nd, 1837, in Boulton, Lankershire, England.

We find in searching English History the Openshaw family was the first to work with, and manufacture cotton goods in England both with the loom and spindle, and later to adopt the modern machinery. He spent his boyhood days in the locality where he was born and was employed at one of these cotton mills. His grandson, Dr. Rulon Openshaw, while filling a mission of the LDS Church in England, visited the old mill in 1924, which was still standing at that time.

Levi worked at the mill in 1852. While thus employed his work brought him a great deal of the time into the office with his employer, who thought a great deal of him. If there were any special privileges given, Levi was given them. A trip for pleasure at the week end, Levi was taken with his employer. He was a favorite with his associates throughout his life for he was always true blue with them. On one occasion his duty at the cotton mill called him from the upper floor to the lower floor of the building. He stepped into the elevator, and as the one whose duty it was to fasten the elevator had failed to do so, it began to be lowered at a rapid rate if speed. Some men who worked at the mill saw it coming down with Levi in it, and knew if it was not checked he would be killed. They held on to the ropes with such force that it came down slowly enough so that he walked our unhurt. The men who had hold of the ropes wore the flesh on their hands in a terrible way, but they said, “We could not stand by and see you killed, Levi.”

The Openshaw family belonged to the Methodist Church and Levi and his boyhood friend Thomas B. Heelis attended the Methodist Sunday School. While attending this Sunday School, he learned the Bible history till he could quote any passage, and find it in a minutes notice. This proved to be of great help to him as a teacher in the Church in later years.

His genial and jovial nature won for him many friends. He was a great lover of sports and jokes, and enjoyed very much to play pranks on his associates, a characteristic which stayed with him throughout his life.

His father’s whole family joined the LDS Church when he was about sixteen years old in about 1852. His two older brothers immigrated to Utah in 1854, and the remainder of the family, consisting of his mother and father and brother and three sisters and himself, came in 1856. When Levi’s employer heard he had joined the church and was coming to Utah with the Mormons, he made him the offer that if he would stay in England and not go to Utah with the Mormons, he would fix him financially so he would not want as long as he lived. Levi loved his employer but he answered, “I have something better than that.” When they parted his employer gave him a Bible and on the fly leaf was written the name of his employer and the address of the mill where Levi was employed.

The family came in a sailing vessel across the ocean and arrived in Council Bluffs, Iowa, to join the Hand Cart Company led by Captain Martin, and partook of the hardships, which we find recorded in history, that this company met with.

Levi did not have his boots off from the time they left Council Bluffs, Iowa until they arrived in Salt Lake City. They were frozen so hard he said he could not have gotten them on
again had he taken them off. His father's whole family passed through the hardships of this company, and all reached Salt Lake City without an injury, although a great many of the company died on the way. Others suffered the loss of some of their limbs. Levi was a very sympathetic man, and the scenes that he passed through on this journey never left him throughout his life. He was seen melted to tears when his friends would question him about things that happened on this journey.

On reaching Utah the family located in Santaquin, Utah, and with the exception of two or three years, the remainder of his life was spent in Santaquin. He made a trip back to the eastern States in 1858, to meet some of the immigrants.

In the early 60's he met Lizzie Eckersley, and made her his sweetheart. In October 20th, 1862 they were married, from which union ten children were born. The first year of their married life was spent in Camp Floyd, (afterword known as Fairfield). While living here Levi was employed part of the time working in a distillery, and the remainder of the time in making adobics. After one year he moved back to Santaquin, and built him a two room adobe house, on the same lot as where he first met his wife. They built two other houses on the same lot during their lifetime, one a five room adobe, and the last an eight room modern brick.

In 1864, he was again sent back to the eastern states to meet more immigrants. On this trip he bought his wife a coal oil lamp and a small cook stove, the first to be used in Santaquin. He next homesteaded a farm, which he owned and operated the rest of his lifetime. As his boys grew up he bought a lumber saw mill with a twenty horse power engine and operated some in Santaquin Canyon, and furnished hundreds of loads of lumber, used in the Tintic mining district, which was used in the mines, also in building dwelling houses. In 1891, a cloud burst in Santaquin Canyon entirely destroyed his saw mill, and he quit the lumber business.

In 1892, the year of the first election on national party lines, he was elected tax assessor and collector and reelected in 1894, serving two four year terms. He served as school trustee for 25 years in Santaquin, was a member of the town board, and acted as its president for several years. He also acted as City Attorney for Santaquin. On one occasion when they were trying a case, one of the leading judges of the state was present, and after Levi had given his plea, the judge told him that the plea was better than a majority of the ones given by the most prominent lawyers in our courts today. He was very well read both in profane and sacred history.

In a church capacity he sang in the ward choir for about twenty years having a beautiful tenor voice, taught the Book of Mormon class of young people for twenty years, was a teacher in the Y.M.M.I.A. and also acted as its president for several years, was one of the presidents of the Fifteenth Quorum of Seventies for many years, and at his death was its Senior President.

In June 1909 he was stricken with sunstroke, and the 2nd day of August of the same year he suffered a paralytic stroke form which effect he died September 2nd 1909 at 4 PM at the age of 72 years.

His kind and sympathetic disposition won for him many friends, both in his young manhood, and also in his matured years. A number of widows came to my mother after his death and said, "We will surely miss Brother Openshaw, for he never forgot us on a Christmas morning." The great respect that was shown in his last sickness and at his funeral, spoke of the esteem in which he was held in his home community. There was not one foot of standing room left unoccupied in the meeting house where his services were held.
Five years after Levi came to Utah his boyhood friend, Thomas B Heelis, joined the Church, and came to Utah and Santaquin. Levi let him have a part of his farm and they worked side by side the rest of their life without a dispute. On the day of Levi’s funeral Thomas B. Heelis, then an old man in the seventies, went up and down the street on the way to the cemetery and kicked the rocks off the road. When asked by his wife what he was doing he said, “Levi’s body has to come up that road. I don’t want it to bump on those rocks.”

Levi died with a strong testimony of the gospel in his heart which had grown stronger with him as he grew in years. His eight living children were at his bedside the last few days of his life.