

A Brief History of My Great Grandfather, Moses Clawson

This story is based upon a diary kept by Moses, which gives some insight concerning things that happened in his life, as well as in the Church. I am grateful for this man leaving information that makes it possible for me to tell you something about him. Truly each of us have a rich heritage, one that we should add our history to, and leave for future generations.

Moses Clawson was born 8 October 1801, in Dryden, Cayuga County, New York. His parents were Ebenezer Clawson and Lowly Foote. They were pioneers to the Dryden area and settled there in 1798. His father died when he was 5 years old. "He was tossed from place to place" until his mother married Josiah Richardson in 1809. In 1821 Moses married Cornelia Brown. They with some other family members pioneered the Greenwood-Troupsburg area of Steuben County, New York, a wilderness with very few inhabitants.

Moses wrote that his mother and stepfather had been Methodists but had joined a very curious sect. He wrote, "I did not myself believe in them. The leader of this sect....could not believe in a God without body, parts, and passions."

In the fall of 1830 Moses was visited by an old gentleman named Colonel John Stevens, who told him of a newspaper report about a Golden Bible, which Moses said, "Thrilled through me like an electric shock.... My desire was to get the book. A few months later he did obtain a copy of the Book of Mormon, which he read carefully and believed. Since further information was not available to the Clawsons, they became associated with different faiths until about 1834.

In 1835 two missionaries (John Gould and Amos Babcock) from the Church headquarters in Kirtland, Ohio came to their area. On March 2, 1835 Moses and several members of his family, and members of his wife's family were baptized. Moses wrote that upon being confirmed a member of the Church "he was visited with a feeling for several days as though my whole frame was on fire, through which I received great knowledge as pertaining to the things of God." He also wrote that after being baptized, "Persecutions raged immediately with unabated fury."

In the spring of 1836, most members of the Church in Greenwood moved to either Kirtland, Ohio or Missouri. As was mentioned previously, Moses's mother and stepfather had joined the Church and had already moved to Missouri, and Moses and Cornelia decided to follow. All the money they received for their valuable home and farm was \$150.00.

By June 1836, citizens of Ray and Clay Counties, Missouri were objecting to the Mormons remaining in those counties. The Moses Clawson family was among the 100 families camped along side "Crooked River," where they had been stopped for several days by citizens of the county and threatened with violence if they did not leave.

Meanwhile, early in August 1836, church officials W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer located a site for a city in a prairie area in northern Caldwell County, which they named Far West. Moses wrote, "arrived 6th August within three miles of Far West. I was one of the first that settled Caldwell County, Far West not being known at that time as a city. Commenced on a new farm. Was blessed in my labors and accumulated property very fast." That winter Moses was ordained to the office of Elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood.

In March 1838, Joseph Smith arrived with plans to settle in Far West. Moses wrote that, "The Prophet was living with us and gave us a great amount of good counsel."

During the summer of 1838, relations between the Latter-day Saints and their Missouri neighbors deteriorated rapidly and erupted in violence. On August 6, Governor Lilburn W. Boggs issued his infamous Extermination order. Three days later a massacre occurred at Haun's Mill, and the siege of Far West by a 5,000 strong militia force began.

You have all heard the story about the arrest of the Prophet Joseph Smith and other leaders. Besides the leaders another 60 or 70 men were arrested and taken to Richmond. Moses wrote, "I with the rest was taken to Richmond, some 40 miles, and there thrust into prison. Snow being some 12 to 14 inches deep, we were dragged through the snow with very little provision and well guarded. After several days a mock trial commenced. Austin A. King, a Methodist preacher, sat as judge. After two weeks of trial, some 20 were liberated, they not being able to find anything against them. Court continued yet three days, and I and four others were liberated. Joseph and others were then taken to the jail in Liberty.

Through his life, Moses was a faithful member of the Church. He was on his second mission to the east, when the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum were assassinated. Moses and Cornelia were endowed in the Nauvoo Temple on January 6, 1846 and began their trek west in the spring of that year, arriving in Kaneshville, Iowa Territory (Council Bluffs). They were ready to go west in 1847 but were requested to stay in Kaneshville and build and repair wagons to help others get to Utah. They eventually traveled west with the George A. Smith Company, arriving in Salt Lake October 27, 1849.

In 1850 Moses was called to serve a mission in England. He served three years and six month, less two days. He presided over the ship Ellen Maria, with 299 Saints on board. On the trip west he was appointed captain over a group called the St. Louis Company (now called the Moses Clawson Company). While he was traveling west his wife, Cornelia was dying of tuberculosis. She was so near death that a messenger was sent to inform Moses of her illness. He borrowed a horse and hurried ahead to be with her. She died 21 October 1853.

On September 25, 1853 Moses married Sarah Ann Inkley, a young woman who had traveled from England with plans to marry Joseph E. Taylor, who had been a missionary and friend of her grandmother's family. When she learned that he was engaged to be married to someone else, she turned to Moses, who had presided over the Ellen Maria, for guidance, and upon Brigham Young's advice they were married, so Moses was a polygamist a few days short of one month.

Moses and Sarah were among about 300 families called by Church authorities between 1861 and 1862 to become permanent residents in what would become the St. George, Utah area. This is where the branch of my family had its beginning.

Moses and Cornelia had 7 sons and 5 daughters. Moses and Sarah had 6 sons and 7 daughters. The Moses Clawson Family Organization estimates that Moses has between 15,000 to 20,000 descendants.