

# The Legacy of the Knight Women

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Some of you might have come today thinking you are not really Knight women or men. You don't carry any Knight DNA, and you feel the need to explain to people who ask at the reunion that you aren't really a Knight, that you are only married to one. I am like you. There is not a drop of Knight blood in my body, but I did marry John Knight Mangum, Jr., and so I have come to reunions. But as I prepared this talk, I was struck by the fact that Polly Peck Knight had no Knight blood, nor did Lydia Goldthwaite Knight, nor Betsey, Martha or Thankful, so we are in good company. But marriage is akin to weaving. The Knight descendants are all those long strings on the loom, the warp threads, and they need the crosswise woof threads woven through or they are just strings. We who are "woof threads" come in and add our own color, but we also hold all the strings together, and the tapestry of a family is created. Whether you are a Knight by blood or marriage, the legacy is shared.

## The beginning of a new life

Even in the first generation there was a large group of Knight women, and a pivotal day in their lives was June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1830. It was a Sunday morning. The Knights and their nearby Peck relatives in the area planned to gather at Polly and Joseph's home on Windsor Road in Colesville, New York. That morning Mother Polly probably bustled in the kitchen to get some breakfast on the table. The family had special guests in their home. Joseph and Emma Smith had come up from Harmony, for this special day. Oliver Cowdery, and John and David Whitmer had also come. The significance was well beyond a family event as a whole group were expected to be baptized into the fold of the tiny new church.

Probably a couple of the guests stayed nearby at Newel and Sally's home, but I am sure Polly's home was busy. There was probably a sense of anxious anticipation in the several Knight family homes as the women brushed their hair, buttoned their dresses, and laced up their shoes. It was a day they recognized might change their lives forever, but they had no way of knowing how much change lay ahead of them.

The day before on Saturday, the Knight men had built a small dam in the stream across the way to make a baptismal pond. Polly Knight and more than a dozen other family members planned to be baptized into the church that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery had organized just 6 weeks earlier. Most of them had been at that first meeting in Fayette at the Whitmer home. Three of Polly Knight's daughters were going to join her in the waters of baptism, as well as a granddaughter, daughter-in-law, and her own sister and sisters-in-law. They were no doubt pleased that Emma Smith was going to be baptized that morning with them.

With great distress the family discovered that during the night a mob gathered and tore down the dam. The group still went ahead with a Sunday meeting in Joseph and Polly Knight's home. Oliver Cowdery preached about the Book of Mormon, the doctrine of repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost. Some

of the folk seated on the benches in Polly's front room were the very men who had torn down the dam. The men waited until after the service was over before they began to argue about doctrine.

Soon Newel's Knight's wife's sister, Emily Coburn, was being harangued by the local Presbyterian pastor who had been tipped off by Emily and Sally's brother about the women's impending baptism. A man arrived with a letter of power of attorney from Emily's father, forbidding her participation with the Mormons. Emily was escorted home.

Early Monday morning before their "enemies" as Newel Knight called his angry neighbors, were on the alert, the group of believers quietly went back to the stream. Emma Smith was the first to be baptized by Oliver Cowdery. Eleven Knight family members followed, but before the baptisms were finished, a mob of about 50 gathered and the Mormons retreated back to Joseph and Polly's home. Newel said the mob intended to commit violence against them, and the Knight men and their church leaders slipped away to Newel's nearby house, unseen.

By evening, when the confirmation meeting was to be held, and all the friends had gathered, the local constable arrived and arrested Joseph Smith for disorderly conduct and "setting the country in an uproar by preaching the Book of Mormon." A mob was waiting to ambush Joseph after his arrest, but the constable after assessing the situation protected him, and took Joseph across the river to South Bainbridge and lodged him in the upper room of a tavern.

### **A Circle of Women**

Father Knight hired an attorney to help Joseph Smith, and many of the Colesville Branch rode over to Hezekiah Peck's home, Polly Knight's brother, and one of those who had been baptized that morning. The attorney recorded that "a number of Mormon women assembled . . . for the purpose of praying for deliverance of the prophet of the Lord. The women came out to our wagon and Mrs. Smith was among the rest." The attorney reported that Emma Smith's heart strings were about to break with grief.

Mobs, anger, and violence were still relatively new to these families. It must have shocked them that fellow neighbors would treat them like this. The Knight men sprang into action and did all they could to help the Prophet Joseph, and meanwhile, the Knight women circled around Emma and gave her love, support and prayers for her husband. I think that circle of women offered a great deal of comfort.

That circle of women was large. It was included women from 11 different households; mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, cousins, and assorted in-laws. These are the women who looked after each other in sickness and health, occasionally snipped a bit at each other because they were as much sister as saint, but their service and sacrifice was genuine.

Later more would join this circle as there were more marriages and more babies. They were a remarkable group of women who left a distinct legacy that rippled through generations. Theirs is a legacy of faith, courage, service, endurance -- and a lot of pluck. But one of the most significant reasons the legacy even exists is that so much of their story was written by themselves or with others. The written word has the power to influence generations.

## **Polly Peck Knight**

Polly Peck Knight was a central figure in this whole clan.

Polly, and all of her 7 children and their 4 spouses at the time joined the church, as did the families of Polly's two brothers Hezekiah and Ezekial Peck, her sister Esther with her husband as well as her widowed sister-in-law Phoebe, and her husband's sister's family.

Polly and her siblings were from a Vermont family that was the 4<sup>th</sup> generation in America. Like her future husband Joseph Knight, she was a small child as the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776 and she grew up in a country at war as America fought to gain independence from Britain. Biographer William Hartley points out that Polly and Joseph were teenagers when George Washington became the country's first president.

Polly married Joseph when she was 21, and they had a lot in common. Joseph Knight, like Polly, came from a Yankee family with roots in England and a Protestant faith. When they married in 1795, they established their home in Halifax, Vermont, near Knight family members. The first five of their seven of their children were born in Vermont, Nahum, Esther, Newel, Anna and Joseph.

About 1809, Joseph and Polly Knight packed up their children, ages 1 to 13, and moved their family to Bainbridge, New York where they bought farm land on the banks of the Susquehanna River, not far from where Polly's parents had moved. In New York, two more little girls, Polly and Elizabeth, known as Betsey, were added to the family. They were a hard working family and they established fields and orchards and built a grist mill on the river and eventually had 142 acres of land. In 1821, the local government in the area of the farm became the Colesville Township.

### **Path to Conversion**

As the older children married and established their own homes and farms in the area, Joseph Knight who had farm land and a grist mill needed to hire some help. That's how Joseph Smith came to spend a fair amount of time in Polly Knight's home in 1826. The young Joseph Smith frequently ate at her table; at times he shared a room with her son, and spent many evenings in her home describing the amazing spiritual experiences that he had had in recent years. The four older married Knight children, Nahum, Newel, Esther, and Anna, all had homes with their spouses, nearby, so they were frequently in the home and heard many of the stories of from Joseph Smith first hand.

While Joseph Smith lived in their home, Joseph and Polly approved of Joseph Smith dating Emma Hale, and the Knight horse and sometimes sleigh were lent on several occasions so Joseph could court Emma through the winter of 1826. In January of 1827, when Joseph Smith eloped with Emma, he took his wife back to Palmyra to live with his parents. But the Knights stayed in close contact with Joseph and were supportive of the young couple in coming years.

Father Joseph Knight, Joseph Knight, Jr., and Newel Knight were the first three in the family to believe Joseph's stories about visits from angels. Polly wasn't quite as certain at first. Her husband wrote in his autobiography that in the winter of early 1828, Joseph Smith and his father

Joseph Smith, Sr., came from Palmyra to the Knight home asking for some help, and Father Knight had only half a dollar to give him to buy paper to translate the gold plates. Father Joseph Smith invited Joseph Knight to come and see him once in a while, and Joseph Knight determined to do just that. He convinced his wife to travel with him.

“I told my wife I must go down and see Joseph again. “Why do you go so soon?” said she. Says I, “Come and see.” Next morning we went down and found them well and were glad to see us. Joseph talked about his translating and some revelations he had received. And from that time my wife began to believe and continued a full believer until she died, and that was the 7<sup>th</sup> day of August 1831,” Joseph Knight, Sr. recorded.

Once convinced, Polly was not just faithful. She was fervent. We believe that Polly was with Joseph Knight her husband and they were among those at the Whitmer farm house on April 6, 1830 when the Church was organized. Six weeks later she was among the group baptized on June 28, 1830 in the stream near her home, despite the threats of angry neighbors.

The Colesville Branch of the Church held their church services and meetings in Polly’s front room. Church visitors were frequent in the Knight home. Sometimes it was Joseph and Emma, or Joseph with other guests, like Sidney Rigdon, the man who riled up neighbors so much with his preaching that a mob would have taken him if they had found him.

The legacy of Polly is more than her faithful heart. She leaves a legacy of constant, quiet service, and taking care of others. She had arms open wide and literal doors opened wide. Meals cooked, guests welcomed, beds made up and floors swept were all part of the quiet support Polly gave her new church. Her home was the home of the first branch of the church. Every week was her turn to clean the church building. I think she could be considered the founding mother of the church Hosting and Hospitality Department due to the number of guests she hosted.

Joseph Knight is remembered for being a friend to Joseph Smith. But it was not just Joseph. Polly and the other Knight women left a legacy as well of support and compassion. They were strong women who supported each other as well as church leaders to get them through trying times.

### **Leaving for Ohio**

When the revelation came that the Colesville Branch was asked to gather to Ohio, they did it. It is no small thing when you are 56 years old and finally seeing a few of the comforts in life, to walk away from your home one cold day and never come back. Polly did that.

So did Nahum and Thankful Knight who left with 7 children.

Esther Knight and her husband William Stringham left Colesville with 3 small children.

Anna Knight and husband, Freeborn DeMille, had four children as they left for Ohio.

Newel wrote about he and Sally leaving saying, “having made the best arrangement we could for the journey, we bade adieu to all we had held dear on this earth except the few who embraced the Gospel.”

The other three Knight children were unmarried, Joseph, Jr., age 22, Polly, age 20 and Elizabeth, who was almost 14, left their home with their parents as well.

When the Colesville Branch of about 60 people left for Ohio, 27 of them were the immediate family of Joseph and Polly Knight. There were 13 adults and 14 children ranging from infants to teenagers. They were joined by 35 others who were sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts and uncles and six others who appear to be unrelated residents of Colesville who had joined the church and chose to gather with the other new church members in Ohio.

When the families from Colesville arrived in Kirtland, Ohio, they were asked as a group to move east a few miles to Thompson, Ohio, and the Colesville Branch were the first group asked by Joseph Smith to live the law of consecration. The family dynamics of consecrating everything might work more easily within a group that is almost entirely related, but maybe not. Imagine your own adult siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles, sisters-in-law and more, sharing everything in common, and you can calculate the challenge. The Colesville group weren't in Thompson long enough to know if they could do it because the man whose land they were living on changed his mind about consecration. And a month after arriving, just as they have built cabins and broken land for farms in Thompson, Newel Knight was asked to lead 14 families in the group to Missouri – the new Zion.

The Lord apparently had a great deal of confidence in these women and their willingness to sacrifice. It's one thing to be a man and get on your horse and ride west to a new land. It's quite another matter to have a nursing baby on your hip, or tired toddlers hanging on your skirts as you pull in to camp and need to wash diapers and feed children and find them a dry spot to make a bedroll on the ground every night.

### **Polly's Death**

To make matters worse, mother Polly Knight was sick as they left Ohio. Newel wrote in his journal:

“My mother's health was very poor and had been for a considerable time. Yet she would not consent to stop traveling, her only or her greatest desire was to set her feet upon the land of Zion and to have her coffin interred in that land. I went on shore and bought lumber to make a coffin in case she should die before we reached the place of our destination, so fast did she fail. But the Lord gave her the desire of her heart and she lived to stand upon that land.”

Polly made it. She made it to Zion. With some excitement the Knights and the Colesville Branch arrived in Independence, Missouri in mid-July. This was to be the New Jerusalem. I suspect they believed this would be their final move. Where would you go after you made it to Zion?

Polly did set her feet on the land of Zion, and she died on August 6<sup>th</sup> a few weeks after their arrival. Newel wrote, “She quietly fell asleep rejoicing in the New and Everlasting gospel and praising God that she had lived to see the land of Zion and that her body would rest in peace after all the suffering she had endured from the persecutions of the wicked.”

Joseph Smith spoke at her funeral the next day and stated, “I can say a worthy member sleeps in Jesus till the resurrection.” Polly Peck Knight was the first member of the church to die in the land newly dedicated as Zion. Her sons made her coffin, and her husband helped in her burial.

The Colesville women left modestly prosperous and comfortable lives, to follow the prophet Joseph Smith. They arrived in Missouri, the new Zion with such hope. For four months these women had fed their families, rocked their babies, taught their children and nursed their sick while living out wagons, tents, and small cabins, and no doubt looked forward to a settled life in Missouri. They had no idea, I am sure that they would continue to live in wagons, tents cabins and then more wagons, tents and cabins for the next two decades as they were alternately led by faith in a prophet and revelation or driven by angry mobs. The Knight family women leave a legacy of commitment and impressive stamina.

In the Missouri years, from 1831 to 1839, 13 Knight family grandbabies were born, even as the families were pushed from one place to the next.

New babies were born, but there were also deaths in those harsh years of being pushed from homes in those harsh years in Missouri. Grandmother Polly died, but so did her daughter Esther at age 33, and Esther's son Harlow at age 8. Malaria hit many of the Missouri settlers hard. Newel had been planning to return to Kirtland to work on the temple but the trip was put off when he got sick. Sally and her sister caught malaria as well, and before she had regained her strength, Sally went into labor and gave birth to her son Eli, who died the day he was born. Sally died two days later, and mother and baby were buried in the same grave. Oliver Cowdery wrote an obituary for Sally that appeared the Missouri church monthly newspaper, the "Latter-day Saints Messenger and Advocate."

Brother Cowdery wrote:

"Forsaken and derided by the most of her relatives for her religion's sake, and called to accompany her husband to the far west with the first branch of the church which migrated to that country. Nothing short of an unshaken confidence in the kind interposition of Providence would have been sufficient to encourage her to move forward. But this we are prepared to say, she endured without a murmur. She was driven, last fall, from Jackson County by the "mob" and was necessarily compelled to endure, with others, further afflictions and privations. We only add, that . . . her society was agreeable; her walk was circumspect and virtuous, and her precepts and examples worthy of her profession."

Sally's death left Newel grieving, but after a few months he decided to go ahead with his plan to return to Kirtland for a time to donate labor to the temple the Saints were struggling to finish. Newel left his little son Samuel in the care of Sally's sister Emily and headed east to Kirtland.

### **Newel and Lydia**

It was in Kirtland that Newel Knight met and married Lydia Goldthwaite.

Lydia is almost certainly the most well-known of the Knight Family women. And there is a reason for that. Her story was written down. Newel Knight, Joseph Knight, Jr., and Joseph Knight, Sr., each left autobiographies or journals. Anna and Freeborn DeMille wrote letters home to family members who puzzled over their conversion that have been saved. These letters, journals and histories give important details about family and church history. Keeping a written record and writing down their testimony was one of the most significant legacies of the Knight family, and the women were involved, which wasn't always the case in that time period.

If you want to be part of history and shape the way your descendants understand you and the events of your time, you need to write it down. Lydia was a very important part of the Knight family because of her role in preserving the story.

### **Lydia's Early Years**

Lydia was the oldest of a large Puritan family in Massachusetts that moved to New York when she was a girl. Her family had a strong work ethic and a devotion to the bible. She was a studious girl and at age 15 Lydia was sent to a boarding school where she could get a better education. In the village where she attended school she met Calvin Bailey and they married a year later. Calvin turned out to be a drinker and abusive. A year after their marriage Lydia gave birth to a daughter. And two years after that she found herself abandoned by her husband, 6 months pregnant and caring for a toddler. Ashamed and despondent she returned to her father's home. Her second child, a boy, died shortly after birth. Almost a year later her little girl took sick and died, and Lydia was sure her heart would break.

Father and Mother Goldthwaite worried about their grieving daughter and arranged for her to have a diversion and visit some family friends across Lake Erie in Mount Pleasant, Canada. It was there in the home of the Nickerson family that she met Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. Within a few days, Lydia was baptized.

Back home, Lydia's parents were not pleased to hear about her conversion. She stayed with the Nickerson's for almost a year, and when she went home, her parents had no patience for her new faith. Lydia decided to go with the Saints to Kirtland, Ohio. Lydia made arrangements to travel with a family also headed to Kirtland, and before she left her father gave her \$50.

### **Lydia's First Donation**

As soon as they arrived in Kirtland, Lydia learned that Joseph Smith was in significant financial distress. With no hesitation, she took the \$50 her father had given her and turned it over to a trusted friend to pay Joseph's debt and perhaps keep him out of jail. It left her without means, however, to even buy a meal. She was invited to live with the Vinson Knight family – no relation to Newel and Joseph Knight family.

Hyrum Smith's wife, Jerusha, asked Lydia if she would move into her boardinghouse and help her. One of the boarders there at the Smith's home was Newel Knight, the sorrowful widower who was 12 years older than Lydia. Quietly the two became acquainted and discovered they had similar sorrows and similar feelings about the Gospel. Lydia remained distant because she believed that even though she had been abandoned, she was still a married woman. One evening Newel and Lydia found themselves alone in the parlor together. Newel spoke up and expressed his interest in courting Lydia. She rebuffed him because she believed she was still a married woman. It took some time for Newel to convince her that under the law, she was no longer married because she had been abandoned for more than 3 years. Years later she learned her former husband had actually died before she had remarried.

Newel turned to his old friend, Joseph Smith, for advice on whether it was advisable if he married Lydia. Joseph heartily endorsed the idea and told Newel he should marry Lydia and the

sooner the better. Hyrum and Jerusha agreed and a few days later they hosted the wedding. Newel and Lydia were married a few days later, on November 23<sup>rd</sup> of 1835, in the Hyrum Smith home, and Joseph officiated at the service. It was the first marriage ceremony that Joseph Smith ever performed.

The couple stayed in Kirtland until the dedication of the temple in April, and then Lydia headed to Missouri to become part of the large network of Knight family members and become mother to Newel's little boy Samuel.

Newel and his father and brother Joseph had been millers in New York. It was natural for Newel to take up that work again in Missouri. Mill building takes time and money, it's a significant investment, which is a problem if you are driven from home.

Life in Missouri was tumultuous. There was trouble with the local people who were angry with the Mormons. When the Mormons were all asked to leave Clay County and move to the almost empty area of Caldwell County, most of the Knight family members left and made new homes in Far West. Newel was in the middle of building a mill, and owed money on the equipment. He couldn't leave quickly because he needed to finish building the mill so he could sell it. When he did sell, he lost \$200 in the deal. Finally, penniless, Newel and Lydia made it to Far West in March of 1838, later than most of the others.

### **Home for a Printing Press**

A month later, when Lydia is just getting settled in Far West, Brigham Young came to Newel and Lydia and said that the Church printing press had just been shipped from Kirtland and they needed a place to set it up. Could they have their home for the printing press? Brigham asked.

Some women who were nine months pregnant may have wondered why the press couldn't sit nicely in a barn somewhere until a building was built for it. Some might suppose that after all they had been through they needed their home. Lydia was about to have a baby. She had a little girl almost two years old and a five year old boy. Was this really an ideal time to ask Lydia to donate her house for a printing press?

The response of Newel and Lydia, "Of course. You can have our home." Newel quickly framed and covered a new house – it doesn't say finished, just framed and covered, and they moved in. Five days later Lydia delivered a son, James Philander Knight. Did Newel fully appreciate the amazing wife he had? I hope Brigham fully appreciated Lydia's sacrifice. I am sure the Lord did.

Side note – a couple of months later Newel took on another mill building job in Clay County. He planted a small garden, made his family as comfortable as possible and left Lydia and the three small children for a month while he hired people to help him build a mill, after all, when a family has debts and bills, a job is a job.

### **A Home in Nauvoo**

Newel and Lydia lost their home and land in the winter of 1838 and '39 to the mobs of Missouri. Knight family members were among the hundreds that filed petitions with the state of

Missouri to seek redress for their losses. The damages Newel filed in complaint with the state of Missouri for lost land is \$1500, as well as moving costs of \$275.

Newel and Lydia had no horse nor wagon, they had to hire a man to take them back to Illinois. But once again they put their children in a wagon and took what little they had left and set out to find a new homes. It was a hard journey that involved camping in the snow and being stranded for a week when the wagon driver they hired said he couldn't go further.

It was many more weeks before they arrived in Nauvoo with their tiny collection of earthly possessions which were unloaded not far from the Smith home. Joyfully they met Joseph Smith who soon has a request of his old friend – “Newel, we need to help all these uprooted Mormon families feed themselves as soon as possible. Can you build a mill?”

Newel didn't have nickel in his pocket, his family was sleeping in a tent made of bedcovers, and it costs a lot of cash to build a mill. Newel explained the situation to the prophet. Joseph found Newel a financial partner with cash to invest in machinery.

Work on a house for Lydia and children halted. Newel moved his family tent to the site where a new mill would be built, and he left for Cincinnati to buy the equipment they needed. He was back in three weeks. It took 8 more weeks to build the horse powered mill, and they started grinding flour for the hungry citizens of Nauvoo.

Three weeks to buy equipment. Eight weeks to build the mill. That's 11 weeks longer that Lydia spent -- May, June and July -- with 3 small children on the ground before her husband could resume work on a house. If Lydia longed for a door that would open and shut, or a solid roof, or a shelf to put a dish on, she kept it to herself. If the prophet asked it, if the church needed it, it was as good as done. She cooked outside her tent on an open fire even when it rained. The family cook stove was among the last things they owned and it was sold in Missouri with their cow so they could hire a man to drive them away from Clay County, Missouri.

### **A Handkerchief with a Blessing**

That summer was a particularly trying because of the bugs. The swampy land bred mosquitoes and mosquitoes carried disease. In July and August of 1839 it seemed like the whole town was sick. The prophet himself was sick for two weeks. Afterward he spent time blessing and healing the sick. Lydia spent many days tending to sick family members.

In September, Lydia was struck with malaria. A small cabin was vacated nearby and Newel moved his family in. It wasn't quite the home they dreamed of, but it would do. Lydia became desperately ill, and for several days she lay in a raging fever, she thought her flesh would be consumed by it. She called her husband and asked him to go to Joseph and the prophet to send a handkerchief with his blessing. Newel didn't want to trouble Joseph who had been worn down himself by the many sick people. Newel put off Lydia's request. The next morning after a long miserable night, Lydia made the request again. Newel left with the handkerchief and came back home and put it on her head.

Lydia didn't improve, she rapidly grew worse. Newel brought the doctor to her, but it did no good. A week passed and fearing that Lydia was close to death, Newel confessed that he had not

wanted to bother the busy prophet, and so he had not really taken the handkerchief to him. Now, fervently repentant about the deception, he took Lydia's handkerchief to Joseph Smith who blessed it and told Newel to tell Lydia "this is from Joseph and he says your Heavenly Father will heal you."

With the handkerchief on her brow, she immediately felt the spirit of healing, and resumed her household work the next morning. The doctor was stunned by her recovery.

This is hardly the end of the struggles for her and Newel. Newel died in Nebraska in 1847, near a Ponca Indian camp on the plains of Nebraska. Lydia's youngest son Hyrum was born 6 months after his father died, and Lydia brought 8 children to Utah alone.

Lydia was educated and worked hard. She gave lessons on making straw hats in Nauvoo, took in laundry in Nebraska after her husband died, and in Utah she taught school and made butter to sell, just to keep her family fed. When Lydia made butter, she always took the first pound of butter and paid it as tithing, not waiting until the tenth. Her own butter started with the second pound she churned. I love knowing that tidbit about Lydia, and I can know it because she wrote it down.

She had, it seems, never ending faith in the words Joseph Smith spoke to her in Canada, two days after her baptism. Before Joseph Smith left the Nickerson home, he came to Lydia and told her he had been pondering why she had seen so much sorrow in her young life. He then said, "Sister Lydia, great are your blessings. The Lord your Savior loves you, and will overrule all your past sorrows and afflictions for good unto you. Let your heart be comforted. You are of the blood of Israel descended through the loins of Ephraim. You shall yet be a savior to your father's house. Therefore be comforted, and let your heart rejoice, for the Lord has a great work for you to do. Be faithful and endure to the end and all will be well."

Lydia's took Joseph's words to heart, and we can tell that by the way she lived her life. She let the good overrule the sorrow, and there was a lot of sorrow through a lot of decades. She was comforted, rejoiced, and endured to the end, and the last decade of her life was spent being a Savior to her father's house as she completed temple work in the newly dedicated St. George temple for her ancestors.

The stories about Lydia are too many to tell in this presentation, and we know them because they were written down. If we want the experiences of our lives to teach or inspire, or guide our posterity, we must write it down. The written word has the power to influence generations.

### **Other records – Mary Elizabeth Knight Bassett**

Not everyone has a journal carefully penned, but their stories, our stories, have sometimes been saved by the careful work of others.

Mary Elizabeth Knight Bassett was the second daughter of Joseph Jr. and Betsey Knight. She was born in Clay County, Missouri in 1836, and it doesn't appear she left a personal journal, or wrote her own autobiography. But due to the sleuthing of a descendant of hers, Ruth Gatrell, her story has been written. It appears that someone wrote a sketch of her life in 1914 when Mary

Elizabeth was still living and 78 years old, probably based on an interview. How we wish that good soul had added his or her name and left a date with that record.

Some other time in Mary Elizabeth's later years, a neighbor and friend sat down with her, probably at a kitchen table somewhere, and recorded important things she remembered about her childhood and life. The notes were written in pencil on newsprint sheets, and then when the stories kept going and the newsprint was full, the neighbor Laura Francom, started to write on the back of grocery lists. Those notes were put in an envelope and saved by Mary Elizabeth's youngest daughter, Lois Gatrell, a grandchild to Joseph Knight, Jr.. Eventually when Lois' son got married in 1945 the envelope was given to the new daughter-in-law, Ruth Gatrell, to type them up.

Ruth Gatrell went beyond that and found a short sketch that had been written about Mary Elizabeth Knight, merged it with the autobiographical sketch she had typed from grocery lists, and added in a few family traditions, and some solid history research filled in some gaps. She did another very significant thing. She wrote a complete description of the sources for her biography of Mary Elizabeth Knight Bassett, with names and dates of those who worked on it are attached to the end of her story. A great-grandson, Stephen Hansen created a digital version and put it on the internet, making it possible for reunion committee member James Knight to send it to my inbox. What a great thing Ruth and Stephen Hansen have done. The stories are valuable, but much more so when they come with sources and are shared.

### **Mary Elizabeth in Missouri**

Joseph Knight, Jr. left his Colesville home with his family as a single, 22 year-old man. Betsey Covert joined the LDS Church as a teenager. She was born near Cleveland, Ohio, and was the only one among her 15 siblings and parents to join. Betsey and Joseph were married in Jackson County, Missouri in 1832, and Mary Elizabeth was born as their second child in 1836 in Clay County.

Mary Elizabeth said her very first memory in life was the birth of her baby sister when she was about 3 years old. She remembers it vividly because they soon were driven from their home in Far West in 1839. She said the mob came into their house and drove them all out.

In Mary Elizabeth's words: "They made us all leave, Father, Mothers and three children, Martha, myself and Rhoda. The baby was about three weeks old. Mother looked so pale and sorrowful. We had to leave everything we had. They drove us, frightening and killing off the stock."

Mary Elizabeth recalled that home in Nauvoo was a log cabin that was across the street from Mrs. Leonard's where she learned her ABCs. They learned to make cheese, Brother Morgan healed her eyes when they were sore, and when she turned 8 she was baptized in the Mississippi River.

"Mother took us to the old bowery by the Temple, and while there we saw the Prophet Joseph Smith. Mother worshipped his name and taught us of him," said Mary Elizabeth.

### **Battle of Nauvoo**

Of her life in Nauvoo, she said, “We lived a hard, poor life. The mob kept at us and wanted to drive us out. We lived close to the temple. The house had a basement and when the mob and fight was on, we were in the basement. Mother baked bread for the army.” During the Battle of Nauvoo, Mary Elizabeth, age 10, and her sisters Rhoda and Martha, who were 7 and 13 years old, helped to fix missiles for the cannons made from scraps of iron, and made bags to hold the missiles, we learn in Mary Elizabeth’s autobiography.

What a rich, first hand vision that gives us of a child’s perspective on life in Nauvoo the Beautiful. Clearly that battle was etched into her memory.

That Battle of Nauvoo that Mary Elizabeth Knight described in her autobiography happened in 1846 when most of the Saints had already left the city. By late spring 1846 nearly 12,000 Mormons had fled the city of Nauvoo for Iowa, including most of the Knight family members. During the summer of 1846 violence against Mormons escalated by organized and armed groups who harassed the people left behind. The remnant still in Nauvoo was mostly those without the means to buy wagons and oxen, and the supplies they needed to leave for the west, which were considerable. Among that group were Father Knight and his wife Phoebe and son Ether. They had stayed hoping to sell property to get the funds to leave. There was also Hezekiah Peck, brother-in-law to Father Knight, and also still in Nauvoo was Joseph Knight Jr. and wife Betsey and four children, including ten year-old Mary Elizabeth.

By the summer of 1846 there was a general lawlessness about the city. The city charter had been revoked by state officials and there were no police. The Nauvoo Militia was no longer intact, the young and strong men were mostly in Iowa, some of the men had already marched off with the Mormon Battalion. The Mormon army that Betsey Knight baked bread to feed would have consisted of family men like Mary Elizabeth’s father, or her aging grandfather or great-uncle. And then there were the little girls putting together cannon missiles in the basement. The Mormon army improvised two steamboat shafts into cannons.

On September 13, 1846 an armed and organized a mob called the Hancock County Posse attacked the Mormons in Nauvoo. Only about 130 armed men were left among the Mormons still in the city and they were hopelessly outnumbered perhaps as much as 10 to 1. After three Mormon men were killed defending their homes, and three days of fighting, the Saints still left in Nauvoo capitulated. They were driven at the point of a bayonet to the river.

Brigham Young heard of the trouble and sent wagons back to the river to gather up the refugees.

While waiting for the ferry to cross the river, Mary Elizabeth remembers that one of the mob seized one of the saints who had returned for something and immersed him in water in the name of “Ole Joe Smith” saying that such would be the penalty for all that came back for anything.

### **Eye Witness to a Miracle**

Once they got across the river in Montrose, Iowa, Mary said, “We were hungry with nothing much to eat.” They had to wait on the banks of the river until teams came after them because they had no wagon, nor teams of their own. She said they were “almost starving, and some were out searching for food, while others were sick and faint for the want of food, when the sky began to

darken like a great black cloud, and hundreds of quail alighted in the camp, and were so tame that they could easily be picked up by hand.” That incident in Mormon history is remembered as the miracle of the quails, and it fed the hungry saints who had nowhere to turn for food.

There was more hunger and more hardship in the next few years. Mary Elizabeth and the rest of Joseph Knight’s family stayed in Winter Quarters until 1850. And once on the trail they endured a bout of the measles, worried about Indian attacks, and sorrowed over the death of a woman who was run over by an ox team. In the valley they had plain food to eat and plain clothes to wear. Some very fine dresses, Mary Elizabeth reports were made from dyed wagon covers.

How much closer history feels, how much closer our ancestors feel when we know their stories and can hear their words first hand.

### **The Legacy they Left**

Mary Elizabeth, Lydia, Polly, Anna, Esther, Elizabeth, Polly, Jr., Betsy, and Sally were a remarkable group of women. The Knight women lived in significant times and endured significant hardship. But neither sorrow nor the physical struggle to care for families amidst hardship defined them. They chose to define themselves by their faith.

Their choices of where they would live, how they would interact with each other, and what they would do with their means and their time was defined by their faith, stamina, and willingness to sacrifice. They were not complainers nor did they expect praise for their efforts. They genuinely believed the words, “Be faithful and endure to the end and all will be well.”

Please keep your next grocery list, turn it over and find someone who will tell you their life story. Keep a journal. Write your own story and preserve it somewhere more permanent than a blog or Instagram. And then preserve the stories of others.

There are other great stories from Knight women. There isn’t time to tell you about Inez Knight Allen and Jennie Brimhall Knight who were the first sisters missionaries for the LDS Church. Nor to tell you about Charlotte Knight, the first woman war correspondent. Those are stories we will save for the next reunion. If you have more stories about Knight women, I hope you will share them with me, so we can share those stories, too.

My granddaughters are the 7<sup>th</sup> generation down from Joseph and Polly Knight and I hope to see that legacy of the Knight women still ripple through their lives and that of their grandchildren. And because we know the stories, and share the stories at times like this, I think that legacy can live on, and that it is a legacy to build upon. The story is not yet over.