

## **Knight Family Connections to Come Follow Me 2025**

### **Doctrine and Covenants Section 124**



*The photo is Mary Elizabeth Knight Bassett in her later years. She is the daughter of Joseph and Betsy Knight, and she shared with a neighbor the details about her home as a child in Nauvoo*

## **Life in Nauvoo for the Joseph Knight, Jr. family as shared by their daughter Mary Elizabeth**

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.

Sometime in her later years Mary sat at a kitchen table with a neighbor and talked about her experiences as a child in Missouri and Nauvoo. Her friend Laura Francom decided to take some notes written with a pencil on sheets of newsprint and when the stories kept going and the paper ran out, the notes continued on the back of grocery lists. Those notes were put in an envelope and saved by Mary's youngest daughter, Lois Knight Gatrell, a grandchild to Joseph Knight, Jr. When Lois' son Wallace got married in 1945 the envelope was given to the new daughter-in-law, Ruth Gatrell, who offered to type them up.

Ruth Gatrell went searching, and also found a short sketch that had been written about Mary Elizabeth Knight in 1914 when Mary Elizabeth was still living and 78 years old. Ruth merged the sketch with the notes she had typed from the backs of the grocery lists, and added in some details from the oral family traditions, and then did some solid history research filled in some gaps. An important piece of family history, and church history was preserved.

On Mary Elizabeth Knight's FamilySearch page [ID #KWNF-XL5] under memories, you can read a history of her life and see photos.

### **Mary Elizabeth in Missouri**

Mary's father, Joseph Knight, Jr., left his Colesville home with his large family as a single, 22-year-old man. Her mother Betsey Covert was born near Cleveland, Ohio and was the only one among her 15 siblings and parents to join. She was a teenager at the time. 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 and the mob came into their house.

In Mary Elizabeth's words, "They made us all leave, Father, Mother 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."

She recalled that their home in Nauvoo was a log cabin that was across the street from Mrs. Leonard's where she learned her ABCs. She learned to make cheese, Brother Morgan healed her eyes when they were sore, and when she turned eight 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.

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." <sup>1</sup>

The army that Betsey Knight baked bread to feed was a rag tag group of family men who all were still in Nauvoo because they hadn't found the means to buy wagons, oxen, and the supplies they needed to leave for the West. The army was composed of men like Joseph Knight,

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth B. Gatrell, *History of Mary Elizabeth Bassett*, Ruth B. Gatrell, Reentered in digital format November 2006 by Stephen A. Hansen, great-grandson, on memories page of Mary Elizabeth Knight, FamilySearch ID KWNF-XL5.

Jr., and his aging father and uncle. During the Battle of Nauvoo in September of 1846, Mary Elizabeth, age 10, and her sisters Rhoda and Martha, who were 7 and 13 years old, helped the army by putting together ammunition for the cannons. They made bags of bits of metal and scrap iron be used as missiles in the cannons that the army improvised from two steamboat shafts.

### **Last to leave Nauvoo**

By late spring 1846 nearly 12,000 Mormons had fled the city of Nauvoo for Iowa, including most of the Knight family members. As summer came on the violence against Mormons escalated and organized armed groups of men harassed the remnant of church members left behind. Among those still in Nauvoo 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 Joseph Knight Jr. and wife Betsey and their four children, including ten-year-old Mary Elizabeth.

That summer 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, and some of the men had already marched off with the Mormon Battalion.

On September 13, 1846 an armed and organized mob called the Hancock County Posse attacked the Mormons in Nauvoo. Only about 130 armed men were left among the church members still in the city and they were hopelessly outnumbered perhaps as much as 10 to 1. After the deaths of three men killed while defending their homes, and three days of fighting, the group that called themselves “The Spartan Band” capitulated. The Saints still left in the Nauvoo were driven at the point of a bayonet to the river.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

### **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, “we were hungry, 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

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Bennett, “Battle of Nauvoo was final chapter in the expulsion from Beloved City,” Church News, Deseret News, September 14, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Gatrell, History of Mary Elizabeth Bassett, FamilySearch.

the camp, and were so tame that they could easily be picked up by hand.” That incident in Church 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. After School she “had only a piece of dry corn bread made of water, salt and cornmeal to eat.” But she added that some very fine dresses, were made from dyed wagon covers.<sup>4</sup>

In Salt Lake City Mary Elizabeth later worked in the home of Charles and Permelia Bassett who lived at South Temple and First West. In 1853 Mary became Charles’ second wife. She lived in the Salt Lake City 14<sup>th</sup> Ward, and became the mother of nine children. She was one of the 14<sup>th</sup> Ward Relief Society who created an album quilt in 1857, that is described in a book with her photo and biography. She died at the age of 90.<sup>5</sup>



Lois Bassett (Gatrell?)      Ruby Bassett (Ashworth?)      Melvie Bassett (Glines?)  
Mary Elizabeth Knight Bassett      Mell (Mary Ellen) Bassett Rodeback

**Mary Elizabeth Knight Bassett and her daughters about 1910**

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<sup>4</sup> Carol Holidrake Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14<sup>th</sup> Ward Album Quilt, 1857*, The University of Utah Press, 2004, pp 73-74.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.