

Knight Family Connections to Come Follow Me 2025

Doctrine and Covenants 127-128



Water's edge of the Mississippi River at the Parleys Street landing in Nauvoo, Illinois, a likely place for Mississippi River baptisms. This site is on the National Register of Historic Places, managed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.

Knight Family members participated in Baptisms for the Dead in the Mississippi River

The introduction of the practice of being baptized in behalf of dear loved ones who had died was received with great enthusiasm by the Saints in Nauvoo. Many had worried about the eternal salvation of their family members who died without the opportunity to hear the restored gospel.

On August 15, 1840, Joseph Smith preached a sermon at the funeral of a Church member, Seymour Brunson, and he noticed a woman in the congregation whose son died before he could be baptized. He revealed that the Saints “could now act for their friends who had departed this life” by being baptized as proxy for them.¹ The Saints greeted this new practice with enthusiasm and soon began to perform baptisms in nearby rivers and streams on behalf of deceased family and friends. Harvey Olmstead performed the first recorded baptism when he baptized Jane Neyman on behalf of her son Cyrus who had died.²

¹ www.churchofjesuschrist.org study topics, “Baptism for the Dead” online article.

² Ibid.

Soon there were hundreds of baptisms taking place in the Mississippi River on behalf of the dead. Wilford Woodruff wrote that one Sunday night after meeting Joseph Smith went down to the river and baptized a hundred and Wilford himself did another hundred, and there were people strung up and down the river being baptized for their dead.

“Why did we do it?” wrote Wilford. “Because of the feeling of joy we had to think that we in the flesh could stand and redeem our dead.” Wilford Woodruff noted that there was a lack of structure as the first baptisms were done, and few recorded the events, “but joy overcame any sense of neglect to properly regulate the ordinance.” And he added, “Of course we had to do the work over again. Nevertheless, that does not say it was not the work of God.”³

Joseph Smith continued to receive revelation to clarify the new doctrine which became sections 127 and 128 in the Doctrine and Covenants. He taught that records should be kept of the baptisms and a recorder of baptisms should be appointed in each ward. An eye witness should be present who could certify the names and dates of the event. The general church should receive the record from the wards to enter it in the general church book of baptisms.⁴

Baptisms in the river continued from August 15, 1840 to October 3, 1841, when revelation came that baptisms for the dead was a work that needed to be done in the temple. The cornerstone for the Nauvoo Temple had been laid on April 6, 1841, but the work on the temple was still in the early stages. William Weeks, architect for the Nauvoo Temple, drew the plans for the temple baptismal font. “Weeks drew twelve oxen shouldering a molten sea, symbolic of the encampment of the twelve tribes of Israel encircling the tabernacle during the days of Moses.”⁵

The font was built in the basement of the temple, under the main hall. It was constructed of pine timber. The oxen were also carved from timber, copied after the “most beautiful five-year-old steer that could be found in the country,” wrote Joseph Smith.

The baptismal font was considered a local wonder, visited by newspaper reporters from Missouri to New York, travelers coming through Nauvoo and local people alike. Eventually a temporary frame and roof were put up to keep out prying eyes.

The temple was far from being finished and so just the basement level with the font was dedicated November 8, 1841. Water to fill the font came from a nearby well. Two weeks later about forty people were baptized in the presence of the Quorum of the Twelve who came to witness the event.⁶ Historian M. Guy Bishop counted that between the river and the font, 6,818 baptismal ordinances for the dead were completed in 1841. Both men and women were eager

³ Susan Easton Black and Harvey Bishoff Black, *Annotated record of Baptisms for the Dead 1840-1845 Nauvoo Hancock County Illinois, introduction*. The BYU Center for Family History and Genealogy, 2002, pp ii-iii.

⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 128:1-5.

⁵ Black and Black, Record of baptism for the dead, p. iii.

⁶ Ibid.

to be baptized for deceased family members. Many in Nauvoo were writing letters to family members to get details on the full names and birthdates of deceased relatives⁷

In June of 1845 Brigham Young announced that the wooden font needed to be replaced, that it had been a temporary font. The first stone was laid on June 25, 1845 by temple stonecutters. Seven months later the *Times and Seasons* newspaper announced the “new stone font, standing upon twelve stone oxen, is about ready.”⁸

Many members of the Knight family were among those eager to offer the blessings of baptism to their deceased family members. Joseph Knight, Jr., and his sister Elizabeth Knight were among the first. The baptism records report that Elizabeth Knight was baptized on March 9, 1841 for her cousin, Sally Bridgeman. On that same day, Joseph Knight, Jr. was baptized for his great uncle, John Bartlett, and his great aunt, Mary Bartlett, and their children, Nathaniel, Polly and John Bartlett. It was not yet required that proxies be the same gender as the person for whom the baptism was done. These baptisms would have taken place in the river.

Most of the baptisms done by Knight Family members list only a year. Because the font in the temple was not in use until mid-November we can assume most took place in the Mississippi River except the three that Lydia Knight did in December of 1841..

Knight family members who did baptisms for the dead in 1841:⁹

Elizabeth Knight

Proxy for her cousin Sally as mentioned, on March 9, 1841

Proxy for Anna Knight, her father's sister,

Proxy for Sarah Knight, her father's sister,

Joseph Knight, Jr.

Proxy for the five members of the Bartlett Family already mentioned on March 9, 1841

Proxy for his “Great-grandmother Crouch”, (Mary Snelling Crouch)¹⁰

Proxy for his “Great-grandfather Crouch,” (Joseph Crouch)

Proxy for Samuel Knight, his great-grandfather

Proxy for William Knight, his great-uncle

Proxy for Beulah Knight, William's wife, his great-aunt

Proxy for Asahel Scott, his uncle

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. p. vii

⁹ All of these records are taken from Black and Black, *Annotated Record of Baptism for the Dead*, pp. 2108-2114, 2216-2126,

¹⁰ Apparently at the time of the baptism, Joseph did not remember the first names of his Crouch great-grandparents but went ahead with the baptisms, anyway. Joseph Crouch died about 90 years earlier, so it was not someone Joseph Knight, Jr. remembered personally.

Betsy Covert Knight, Joseph Jr.'s wife

Proxy for Martha Covert, her mother

Proxy for Thomas Judd, her grandfather

Proxy for Polly Carpenter, her aunt

Joseph Knight, Sr.

Proxy for Alfred Knight, his deceased brother

Proxy for Benjamin Knight, his deceased brother

Proxy for Grandmother Anne Knight

Proxy for Samuel Knight, (b. 1710) his grandfather

(It appears Joseph Knight Sr. and Jr. were both baptized for this ancestor.)

Proxy for Samuel Knight, his uncle (a half-brother to his father, born to grandfather

Samuel Knight's first wife. Joseph Jr. was also baptized for this man.)

Proxy for Samuel's wife, his aunt. (Ann Clapp, her name not listed on baptism record.)

Proxy for Sarah Crouch Knight, his mother

Lydia Goldthwaite Knight

Proxy for Hannah Bacheden, a great-aunt

Proxy for Asahel Burt, a cousin

Proxy for David Burt, her grandfather

Proxy for Silence Burt, known as Tilley, wife of David, her grandmother

Proxy for Betsey Carpenter, a cousin

Proxy for Jonathan Carpenter, a cousin

Proxy for Samuel Carpenter, an uncle-in-law

Proxy for Tiley Carpenter, her aunt

Proxy for Joseph Goldthwaite, a great-uncle. Done December 6, 1841, probably in the Nauvoo Temple font.

Proxy for Steven Goldthwaite, her grandfather. Done December 6, 1841

Proxy for Zaddock Goldthwaite, her uncle, on December 6, 1841

Proxy for Jesse Johnes, her uncle

Proxy for Lucy Johnes, her aunt

Proxy for Lucy Taylor, her aunt

Proxy for Sally Taylor, her cousin

Proxy for Samuel Taylor, her uncle

Phebe Crosby Peck Knight (2nd wife of Joseph Knight, Sr.)

Proxy for Elisha Crosby her father

Proxy for Susan Crosby, her mother

Proxy for Benjamin Peck, her deceased first husband

In the 1841 records of Baptisms for the Dead there is no record indicating that Newel Knight was a proxy in baptisms for deceased ancestors, nor his younger sister Polly Knight Stringham, or sister Anna Knight DeMille. Anna and Freeborn were living in Quincy, Illinois in 1841 and

moved to Nauvoo in 1842. Other family members who performed baptisms for the dead were Hezekiah and Martha Peck, Ezekial and Electa Peck, and Hosea Stout.¹¹

Diane Mangum – October 2025

¹¹ William G. Hartley, *Stand By My Servant Joseph*, Deseret Book, 2003, p.325.