

**Elizabeth Knight Johnson**  
**1817 - 1883**  
**Daughter of Joseph and Polly Knight**



Elizabeth was the youngest of the seven children of Joseph Knight and Polly Peck. She was born 22 July 1817 in Colesville Township, New York. Her parents were both from New England families who came to America as part of the Great Migration from England in the 1620 to 1640.

Polly and Joseph Knight spent their early years of marriage in Halifax, Vermont, but in 1808 Polly and Joseph Knight moved to Bainbridge, New York near Elizabeth's Peck grandparents on the Susquehanna River. A couple of years later Joseph and Polly moved their family six miles downriver to Colesville Township.

In Elizabeth's childhood she was often called Betsy, and the Knight household was a busy place with a large family a great deal of work to do. Her father had a large farm and a grist mill on the river. Elizabeth's three oldest siblings were much older than she. When she was born her oldest brother Nahum was 21, her sister Esther was 19 and brother Newel was 17. Elizabeth's next closest sibling was sister Polly who was six years older.

In 1826 a young man named Joseph Smith was hired by Joseph Knight, Sr. to work on his farm and in his mills. Joseph Smith had done work for some other neighbors in the area over the past year. That fall of 1826, the hired laborer often stayed for the night in the Knight home, sharing a room with Betsy's brother Joseph Knight, Jr. In time, when Joseph Smith came to trust the Knight family, he began to share with them some of his amazing spiritual experiences. Betsy's father, Joseph Knight, Sr. was especially in Joseph Smith's recounting of experiences with the Angel Moroni and gold plates.

When Joseph Smith organized a church on April 6, 1830 in Fayette, New York, it is almost certain that Elizabeth was there with her parents and among the 20 people from Colesville who attended the meeting.

On June 28, 1830, a baptism was planned for a large group of close and extended family members of the Knights. A mob destroyed the dam that had been built to create a baptismal font.

Two days later a second dam was built in secret and this time a baptismal service was held and many in the Knight family were baptized before mobs came to disrupt their service again.

Elizabeth Knight was baptized November 1, 1830 in Colesville, when she was 13 years old. In some written materials about Elizabeth it has been noted that she was the youngest member of the church at the time of her baptism. However, Elizabeth's older sister Esther had a daughter Julia Stringham, who was baptized at the age of 12 just a few months before Elizabeth was baptized. It might be noted that Julia Stringham did not remain in the LDS church as an adult, but Elizabeth stayed strong throughout her life. Elizabeth and Julia were the first two "Young Women" of the church.

When the Knight family learned in January of 1831 that a revelation came to the Prophet Joseph that the Saints should all gather in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph and Polly Knight made plans to move. Their departure from Colesville came sooner than expected. A mob one night gathered, hoping to grab Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon who had been visiting Colesville and the Knight home. Joseph Knight, Sr., learned of the intentions of the mob, and warned the church leaders who left town in a different route. Realizing that his household was in danger as well, Joseph Knight and Polly packed up a few things, and took Elizabeth and daughter Polly with them as they quietly slipped out of town in a sleigh. They headed for Kirtland, accompanying Joseph and Emma Smith and some others, and arrived February 1, 1831.

After only 6 weeks in Kirtland, the Colesville members of the church were asked to go to Missouri, which was really the western frontier of America. Elizabeth's mother Polly Knight died within a few days of their arrival in Kaw Township. She was 14 and her sister Polly was 20 when their mother died. Their father remarried Phoebe Crosby two years later.

Elizabeth spent her teenage years in Missouri in a time that was harsh and turbulent for Mormons. They were driven from homes. The governor even ordered an extermination order against Mormons and they were treated as enemies of the state. The Knights continued to build mills and homes in Missouri, but by 1839 all Mormons were driven from the area. It appears that Elizabeth was on her own, at age 22 at that time, probably living with a family member, because she is not listed among her father's family as he left Missouri, which included Phoebe, and their two young boys Ether and Charles, and Phoebe's three daughters from a first marriage.

In 1840 in Nauvoo, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught the doctrine of baptism for the dead was taught. Many were soon eager to be baptized as a proxy on behalf of deceased ancestors. Members of the church turned to the Mississippi River and took lists of names of dead relatives and friends for whom they were baptized.

Elizabeth Knight and her brother Joseph Knight, Jr., were among the first to be baptized for the dead for their ancestors, as were some of their Peck extended family members. Baptisms for the dead were only done in the river until a font was finished in the lower level of the Nauvoo Temple and the Saints received instruction that thereafter all work for the dead must be done in a dedicated temple.

The cornerstones for the Nauvoo Temple were laid in April 1841 and there was a large ceremony that included a parade of the Nauvoo Legion, which included quartermaster sergeant, Joseph W. Johnson.

On Feb. 3, 1842, Elizabeth married Joseph W. Johnson in Nauvoo, a brick mason. Hyrum Smith performed the ceremony, the young couple found a home near her brother Newel's home and the Joseph Smith home, and not far from Elizabeth's father's home. The Knight siblings stayed in touch with each other and often visited.

Six weeks after Elizabeth's marriage, on March 17, 1842, the Nauvoo Female Relief Society was organized. Two weeks later several of Elizabeth's extended family joined the organization, and on April 14, 1842 at the organization's 4<sup>th</sup> meeting, Elizabeth and her sister Polly Knight Stringham became members. Elizabeth sewed clothing for temple workers as a Relief Society sister.

In 1843 Elizabeth gave birth to her first child, Carmelia Esther Johnson, a little girl who died in July of 1844. Another son Hyrum was born in 1845. Hyrum only lived 10 months before he died 18 December 1845.

Elizabeth and her husband Joseph Johnson received their temple endowment and marriage sealing ordinance in the Nauvoo Temple in December of 1845. Elizabeth and Joseph were among the thousands who left Nauvoo in the early months of 1846.

The Johnson family was living in Mt. Pisgah, Iowa when Elizabeth's third child, Castina, was born in August of 1846. Elizabeth gave birth to another girl, Elizabeth, in 1847 in Iowa. The family joined the Brigham Young Company and came west in 1848.

On the pioneer trail in southwestern Wyoming, mother Elizabeth gave birth to twin girls on September 28<sup>th</sup> and named them Sarah and Mary. Both baby girls died the same day.

Joseph and Elizabeth made their home in Salt Lake City. In 1849 Elizabeth gave birth to a baby boy, Joseph, who lived only a day. Elizabeth's daughter, Elizabeth, also passed away as a child. In years to come, Elizabeth gave birth to two more children who lived to adulthood, Elizabeth Darlin Johnson in 1855 and David Johnson in 1859.

Joseph Johnson and Elizabeth made their home in the 14<sup>th</sup> Ward of Salt Lake City, where coincidentally, Elizabeth's niece, Mary Knight Bassett, the daughter of her brother Joseph Knight, Jr., also lived.

Elizabeth was part of one of the first ward Relief Societies organized in the Salt Lake Valley in June of 1854 in response to the call from Brigham Young for the sisters to organize again. The women began again to help care for the poor and needy, especially new immigrants. In 1857 the Fourteen Ward Relief Society sisters each made a quilt block that was put together for a ward raffle to benefit the Perpetual Immigration Fund. Elizabeth made a lovely red flower in a Rose of Sharon pattern for her block. Her niece Mary Bassett also sewed a block with three orange flowers to the quilt that still exists today.

Elizabeth's husband, Joseph, married three other wives, and apparently Elizabeth needed to be somewhat independent in caring for her children and taking care of her home. Elizabeth died in Salt Lake City in 1883 at the age of 66.

Three of Elizabeth's children lived to adulthood:

Castina Johnson married Wesley Trescott in 1868 and has no known children

Elizabeth Darlin Johnson married Henry Gardner in 1874 and they had eight children.

David Knight Johnson married Amelia Francis Howell in 1889 in Logan and they had four children.

Diane L. Mangum, 2018

Sources:

William G. Hartley, *They are My Friends, a History of the Joseph Knight Family*, 1986, Grandin Press.

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Carolyn Holindrake Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14<sup>th</sup> Ward Album Quilt, 1857*, 2004, University of Utah Press.