

Polly Peck

1774-1831

Wife of Joseph Knight, Sr.

From "The Life and Times of Polly Peck Knight" by Murial Musig Hawkins

Polly Peck was born April 16, 1774 in Guilford, Windham County, Vermont. Her parents were Joseph Peck and Elizabeth Reed. Her ancestors were Pilgrims and had helped settle the Plymouth Colony. Polly was the sixth of their thirteen children. She was a child when turmoil engulfed her family during and after the American Revolutionary War. They were living in Guilford, Vermont which was an area claimed by both the states of Vermont and New York. The people in Guilford sided with New York and requested protection. The governor appointed Polly's father to be captain of a local militia to defend their homes. Vermont sent a militia under the leadership of Ethan Allen to suppress the Guilford "rebels." During the skirmish, the Peck home was plundered and some of their possessions were carried off.

To compensate the "Vermont Sufferers" for their losses, New York granted them land in the southern part of the state of New York. Captain Peck received 640 acres, and the family moved there shortly after 1788.

Polly was only 14 when her parents moved, but apparently she stayed behind. It was the practice for young women to hire out at an early age. They would do household labor and often learn the skills of spinning and weaving. Perhaps Polly had a good place of employment.

Seven years later, in 1795, Polly married Joseph Knight. She was 21 years old and he was 23. Joseph was born 26 Nov 1772 in Oakham, Worcester County, Massachusetts. His ancestors were Puritans who had arrived in New England during the 1630's. Joseph's father, Benjamin, built and operated a mill in Windham County, Vermont. They had children in both places. Eventually they would have 7 children: Nahum born 1796, Ester 1798, Newel 1800, Anna 1804, Joseph Jr. 1808, Polly 1811, and Elizabeth 1817. Polly was 38 years old when her last child was born.

Home in New York

In 1808 Joseph and Polly took their young children and moved to Bainbridge, New York, close to her parents. They lived near the bend in the Susquehanna River. But after 2 years they moved 6 miles downriver to the out-skirts of the town of Colesville. This place was more suitable to their needs. There was a stream that had the right fall where Joseph could build a mill.

The land was bordered on one side by the Susquehanna River and a small lake, Pickerel Pond, on the other. This was virgin land that had never been settled before. The whole family worked hard to clear the land and build a house and farm outbuildings. After the land was cleared, they had an area for pasture and fields on the lower part, with a stream running through to the river. Joseph was very industrious. Besides the grist mill, he added two carding machines. He also bought three additional farms. The Knight boys were old enough to help, and they were kept busy at the mill and on the farm.

Joseph and Polly's son Newel states, "Father Knight was not rich, yet he possessed enough of this world's goods to secure to himself and family not only the necessities, but also the comforts of life. His father raised the children "in a genteel and respectable manner." and gave them "a good common school education." Even the daughters were educated, which was not always the case in those days.

The Knights were generally respected by their neighbors and because of the mill were well-known throughout the area. The family followed the Universalian doctrine of religion which held that everyone gains salvation and that there is no eternal damnation.

During 1826 a young man named Joseph Smith worked for the Knight family and lived with them. When he told them in confidence about his experience with heavenly beings, and that he was to eventually receive sacred records, they felt he was sincere.

During that winter Joseph Smith courted a young lady named Emma Hale who lived across the river and down the road twenty miles in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Joseph had boarded with her family when he worked in that area for a short time. Joseph sometimes borrowed the Knight horse and cutter to do his courting and used it when he and Emma eloped and were married. Joseph and Emma started marriage in the home of Joseph's parents in Palmyra, New York.

Joseph Knight and his friend Josiah Stowell were at the Smith farm when Joseph Smith acquired the gold plates from the angel Moroni, so he could translate them. Joseph Smith Jr. had borrowed Joseph Knight's horse and buggy to obtain the plates.

Help for Joseph and Emma

Later Joseph and Emma Smith moved to Harmony to work on the translation. Eventually a young teacher who met the Smith family in Palmyra, New York, also went to Harmony to help with the translation. One day they went to the Knight home to request provisions, so they could continue the translation without having to stop to do day labor to provide for themselves.

Joseph Knight recorded, "I bought a barrel of mackerel and some lined paper for writing. I bought ten bushels of grain and five or six bushels potatoes, and a pound of tea, and I went down to see them and they were in want." This made it possible for them to go on with the translation instead of seeking employment as they were trying to do. Joseph Knight Sr. continued, "Then they went to work and had provisions enough to last till the translation was done."

April 6, 1830 the Church was organized and some converts were baptized at that time. Joseph Knight Sr. said he wanted to read more of the Book of Mormon before he committed to baptism.

In June 1830 Joseph Smith, Emma, and Oliver Cowdery came to Colesville to visit the Knights. Joseph found "a number of the neighborhood still believing, and now anxious to be baptized." He conducted a baptismal meeting with plans to baptize the group afterward. Newel had previously erected a dam across a stream which was close by. During the night a mob collected and tore away the dam. The believing saints rebuilt the dam. Early the next morning, June 28, 1830 Oliver Cowdery baptized fifteen converts. All but two were Knight relatives. Joseph Knight Sr. and Polly and some of their children and spouses were among the group baptized. Emma Smith was baptized at this time.

The Knights and many of their relatives who had joined the church moved to Kirtland, Ohio, to flee persecution in New York. Their group became known as the Colesville Branch. When troubles arose over the land the branch was preparing for farming, Joseph Smith called them to become the first to settle in Jackson County, Missouri. Polly Knight became ill during the journey and told her family her greatest wish was to see what Joseph Smith had called Zion, or Jackson County. A short time after arriving in Jackson County Polly became the first of the saints to die.