

Phebe Crosby Peck Knight

1800-1849

Second Wife of Joseph Knight, Sr.



Phebe Crosby was born in the southwest corner of New York state in the small town of Unadilla, on 21 March 1800, to Elisha and Susan Crosby. Her parents moved north to Chenango County, and it was there she met Benjamin Peck.

Benjamin and Phebe were married 5 March 1817 in Bainbridge when Phebe was not quite 17 and Benjamin was 30 years-old. Benjamin was the 12th of the 13 children of Capt. Joseph Peck and Elizabeth Read. The Peck family was from Vermont, and his service in the New York militia was repaid with title to 640 acres of land in Chenango County, New York, in the area now known as Afton. Most of the Peck family were farmers, but Benjamin worked on the river, the Susquehanna flowed through the area, and he was a pilot to guide rafts loaded with cargo going up and down the river.

Phebe and Benjamin were the parents of six children, Samantha, who died in early childhood, Hezekiah, Samantha, Henry, Henrietta and Sarah Jane. Henry also died as a toddler.

Benjamin died in 1829, and before he passed away, he gathered his family and told the true church had not yet been established on the earth, but said that there will be one soon, and told his children they would join it.

Living in Bainbridge, just miles from the Colesville home of Joseph Knight, Benjamin and Phebe would have known about Joseph Smith. Benjamin's older sister Polly and her husband were

friends of Joseph Smith who spent a fall season working on their farm. After that Joseph Smith was often in the Knight home and by 1829 was often teaching about religious principles.

Two of Benjamin Peck's sisters, Polly who married Joseph Knight, and Esther, who married Aaron Culver, and two of his brothers, Hezekiah and his wife Martha, and Ezekial and his wife Electa all joined the church organized by Joseph Smith in 1830. Phebe Crosby Peck was baptized in 1830 and she and her children became part of the Colesville Branch of the Church of Christ, later to be named The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In the spring of 1831 when all the members of the new church were asked to gather to Kirtland, Ohio, Phebe and her four children were among the members of the Colesville Branch that packed up their belongings and moved to Kirtland. They all lived for a short time in Thompson, Ohio and live the United Order. Within a couple of months they were asked to move to Missouri, and their group leader was Newel Knight.

Phebe had the support of extended family, but moving across country as a young widow with four children ages 5 to 10 years old must have been challenging.

The Colesville Branch members settled in Kaw Township, west of Independence. They were literally on the far western edge of America on the frontier with few of the comforts that might have been found in a larger community.

The group had been in Missouri only ten days when Polly Peck Knight, the wife of Joseph Knight, Sr. passed away after a lingering illness.

The years in Missouri were hard, and marked by violence and harassment against the members of the church by others in the area who wanted them to leave.

In 1833, almost 2 years after Polly passed away, Joseph Knight, Sr. and Phebe Crosby Peck were married, and Joseph Knight became the step-father to Hezekiah, Samantha, Henrietta, and Sara Jane Peck. Phebe was almost 33 years-old and Joseph was 60 years old.

In June of 1834, Phebe gave birth to Joseph Knight's eighth child, son, Ether Crosby Knight, in Liberty, Missouri. Two years later, another son was born, Charles Coulson Knight. These were hard years for the Knight family and all the members of the Colesville Branch. They were driven from homes in Kaw Township, and built again in Clay County. But only a few years later, they were pushed from Clay County into Caldwell County, where they again tried to establish homes and a community.

Joseph Knight was not robust at this point in his life, and supporting a young family became a challenge as his health was declining. Early in 1839, the Latter-day Saints were pushed out of their homes in Caldwell County, Missouri, and they headed east to Nauvoo, Illinois and surrounding communities. It was in Quincy, Illinois that Phebe and Joseph's little son Charles passed away on 13 August 1839. Many in the area struggled through that year with sickness, probably malaria, and some like young Charles, died.

Joseph and Phebe made a home in Nauvoo, near many of their children. Joseph had been a great friend to Joseph Smith in the young prophet's early years, and the city council wanted to repay that kindness by giving Joseph Knight a building lot. The newly formed Relief Society in 1842 helped to hire someone to plow the field for Joseph Knight, Sr. and asked for donations towards helping get furniture for the home. Joseph Knight had been a miller and farmer in Colesville, and sons Newel and Joseph built mills in Missouri and in the Nauvoo area, and they helped support their father and his young family.

In 1846, when most of the saints were leaving Nauvoo due to the threats and intimidation of men in surrounding communities, Joseph Knight, Sr., his son Joseph Knight, Jr., and Phebe's brother-in-law Hezekiah Peck and their families did not go, because they did not have the means to go. They had lost homes and work so many times, and they had nothing left to buy wagons and oxen and supplies for a journey west.

In September of 1846, in what was called "The Battle of Nauvoo," the family was among the last in the city trying to defend their homes. They were hopelessly outnumbered, and after only six days of a "battle," the church members capitulated after a few men were killed. Their family was marched by mobs down to the edge of the Mississippi River where they ferried across. They landed in what was called the Poor Camps of Missouri with just what they could carry from their homes, and had almost nothing to feed their children. One of Joseph Knight, Jr.'s daughters, Mary described her memory of the event and how a huge flock of quail came into the camp, so calm that they could pick them up to catch them. Those quail saved them from possible starvation.

Church leaders sent wagons to pick up the people stranded there in Missouri and took them back to Winter Quarters and surrounding areas. Joseph and Phebe Knight went to Mt. Pisgah, near the home of her daughter Sarah Jane, who lived there as a plural wife of Charles C. Rich. In February of 1847, Joseph Knight, died, leaving Phebe a widow yet again.

Phebe quickly remarried as a plural wife after Joseph's death. Phebe married Cornelius Peter Lott on 30 March 1847 in Winter Quarters, Nebraska. She was 46 years old at the time and Cornelius Lott, age 48. On the same day, Lott also married another woman, Eleanor Wayman, age 54. They were his 6th and 7th wives.

There are no known records to give insight to what Phebe's son Ether thought or where he lived once his mother remarried.

Cornelius Lott was father to 10 children ages 3 to 23 by his first wife, Permelia. Before leaving Nauvoo in 1846, he was been sealed to four other women: Charity Dickson, a widow and age 69; Eliza Davis, who had been widowed twice and was age 55; Rebecca Faucett age 16; and Jane Rodgers, age 18.

It is difficult to sort out what the actual relationship was between Cornelius Lott and the women he married, particularly Phebe. None of the 6 polygamous wives traveled west to Salt Lake City with the Lott family. Charity apparently left the relationship and died in St. John, Missouri in 1849. Eliza in her later years lived with her son, joined the RLDS church and died in White Cloud, Kansas in 1876.

Lott family stories found on Family Search report that Rebecca Faucett left her husband Cornelius in Winter Quarters, and that she gave birth to a son Isiah Lott in November of 1846 that Cornelius "never saw." Rebecca later remarried in Iowa in 1850, came to Utah and had 3 daughters with her second husband. We know nothing more about Jane Rodgers or Eleanor Wayman.

When Cornelius Lott he left for the Salt Lake Valley in the Heber C. Kimball Company, Cornelius was accompanied only by his first wife and their children, and they had another child in the Salt Lake Valley in 1848. Phebe and her son were not with them. In fact, in the Overland Data base, there are no records of Phebe Peck Knight Lott, ever coming to the Salt Lake Valley in any company in under any name. Family records report that Phebe Knight died in Nauvoo on 6 May 1849, with no clues as to why she left Winter Quarters and returned to Nauvoo.

By Diane L. Mangum for the Knight Family website, November 2020.