

Knight Women and Relief Society

The first meeting of the Relief Society, the LDS Church women's organization, was held March 17, 1842 with 20 women present and seven more were put on the membership rolls. The purpose of the organization was to see to the wants of the poor, but also for spiritual edification of the members. The minutes of the fifth meeting recorded, "The spirit of the Lord like a purifying stream refreshed every heart." President Emma Smith exhorted the women to conduct themselves so as to have "The honor of commencing a good work and of carrying it out."

Women needed to request membership and be voted on as being of good character by current members before being admitted to the organization. Membership grew rapidly. At first meetings were generally held on Thursday afternoons at the Nauvoo Red Brick Store, but outgrew that and used the "Lodge Room", and by June, 1842, with hundreds of members, the meetings were held outdoors in the Grove in Nauvoo.

When the Knight women and extended family members joined Relief Society:

4th Meeting— Thursday, April 14, 1842, Lodge Room

Phoebe Crosby Peck Knight, 2nd wife of Joseph Knight, Sr., joined
Polly Knight Stringham, and her sister **Elizabeth Knight Johnson*** joined
There were now about 75 members of record. Of those attending the meeting, six made cash donations for the poor, totaling \$4.75

6th Meeting — Thursday, April 28, 1842, Lodge Room

Lydia Goldthwaite Knight joined the organization
Joseph Smith spoke at the meeting about spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues.

7th Meeting — Thursday, May 12, 1842, Lodge Room

Electa Buck Peck, sister-in-law of Phoebe Knight joined
Sarah Peck and Henrietta Peck Rich, daughters of Phoebe Peck Knight joined
Jemima Peck joined, as did about 160 other new members.

9th Meeting — Thursday, May 26, 1842, Lodge Room

Mary Ann Peck, daughter of Martha and Hezekiah Peck joined

10th meeting — Friday, May 27, 1842, in the Grove

Mrs. President [Emma Smith] ". . . Impressed the necessity of being united in doing good to the poor — said she had hired a poor man to plough and fence father Knights [Joseph Knight, Sr.'s] lot at \$.22,60, and solicited the Society in behalf of the payment which might be made in provision, clothing and furniture."

More than 200 women were made members of Relief Society at this meeting.

11th Meeting — Thursday, June 9, 1842, Grove

Anna Knight Demille, 4th child of Joseph Knight, Sr., and Polly Peck Knight, joined as a new Relief Society member. Mary Ann Peck donated \$.25

***Elizabeth Knight Johnson**, was also one of the original members of the 14th Ward Female Relief Society in Salt Lake City in 1856 when Relief Society was reorganized in Utah.

The Knight Family Women

The First and Second Generations

Polly Peck Knight, born in 1774, wife of **Joseph Knight, Sr.**, a farmer and miller

Married at age 21, Joseph was 24.

Mother to 7 children, all lived to adulthood

Died in Missouri in 1831 at age 57 of illness

Husband married widow, Phoebe Crosby Peck, Polly's sister-in-law two years later

Phoebe Crosby Peck Knight, born 1800, 2nd wife of **Joseph Knight, Sr.**

In 1829, first husband Benjamin Peck died; he was a brother to Polly Peck Knight

Left Colesville as a widow with 4 children

Married Joseph Knight in Missouri in Oct. 1833, she was 33, he was 61

Phoebe was the same age Joseph's son Newel

Mother to 2 more sons by Joseph Knight: Ether, and Charles who died at age 3

In 1842, joined the Female Relief Society in Nauvoo at the 4th meeting

After Joseph's death in Iowa, later married Cornelius Peter Lott as a plural wife

Thankful Knight, born in 1798, wife of **Nahum Knight**, a wheelwright

Married at about age 19, and Nahum was 21

Mother to 9 children, 8 born in Colesville, NY, and another in Missouri

Lived in Washington, Missouri in 1850, Thankful possibly died between 1850-1860

Thankful and Nahum probably disaffected from the LDS Church by 1850

Esther Knight Stringham, born 1798, wife of **William Stringham**, a tailor

Married at age 18, and William was 28. They met when he came to work in the Knight mill

Mother to 5 children, two who lived to past age 16

Died in Missouri in 1831 at age 33

Husband William married her sister Polly Knight about 2 years after Esther's death

Sally Coburn Knight, born 1804, wife of **Newel Knight**, a miller

Married about age 21, Newel was 25

Mother to 2 sons, and 2 still born babies; only son Samuel lived to adulthood

Took into her home her husband's widowed Aunt Esther

Died in 1834 in Missouri at age 30 from malaria and childbirth, two days after her newborn son Eli died

Husband Newel married Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey a year later

Lydia Goldthwaite Knight, born 1812, 2nd wife of **Newel Knight**, a miller

First marriage at age 16 to Calvin Bailey, mother to two children by him who both died in early childhood. Abandoned by Bailey, who then died in 1833

In 1835 married Newel Knight at age 23, Newel was 35

Mother to 7 children by Newel who all lived to adulthood, came to Utah with children ages 3-14

In 1842 joined the Female Relief Society in Nauvoo at the 6th meeting

Widowed at age 35 in Nebraska, and delivered the 7th child by Newel six months later

Married John Dalton in 1852 in Utah as plural wife, bore a daughter, Artemesia Dalton

Divorced Dalton in 1857 after 5 years of marriage

Married James McClellan, a widower, in 1864

Wrote her life story in 1883

Died in 1884 at age of 72 in St. George, Utah

Anna Knight DeMille, born 1804, wife of **Freeborn DeMille**, worked in mills and farmed

Married at age 15, Freeborn was then age 23

Mother to 7 children who all lived to adulthood, one daughter died age 21 in Winter Quarters

In 1842 joined the Female Relief Society in Nauvoo at the 11th meeting

Crossed the plains with 4 children, mostly teenagers

Died in Manti at the age of 74

Freeborn in later years married a plural wife, Emma Richards

Betsey Covert Knight, born 1813, first wife of **Joseph Knight, Jr.**, a miller

Married at about age 19 in Jackson County, Missouri in 1832, Joseph was 24

Mother to 6 children, only 3 daughters lived to adulthood

The other children were 2, 4, and 5 years old when they died

Died at age 62 in Salt Lake City

Husband married to 3 other plural wives including:

Adeline Johnson Knight, a plural wife married in Winter Quarters, 1847 who does not appear to have come to Utah, no known children

Abba Welden Knight, a widow from Philadelphia, married in April 1852 in Salt Lake City as a plural wife, no known children

Mary Woolerton Knight, 4th wife of **Joseph Knight, Jr.**

Married on Nov. 1852 as a plural wife at age 26, when Joseph was 44

British convert; Joseph married Mary as advised by Brigham Young so Joseph could have a male heir

Mother of three children, first daughter died as infant and her two sons, Miland Knight and Joseph Knight III lived to adulthood

Polly Knight Stringham, born 1811, 2nd wife of **William Stringham**, a tailor

Married in Missouri in 1835 about age 24 and William was 47

Gave birth to one son Walter, helped raise sister Esther's children

In 1842 joined the Female Relief Society in Nauvoo at the 4th meeting

In 1843 Relief Society minutes report she volunteered to sew for temple workmen

Died in Nauvoo in April 1844, at age 33

Husband later married Eliza Lake

Elizabeth Knight Johnson, born 1817, wife of **Joseph W. Johnson**, a mason

Married Feb. 1842 at age 25 in Nauvoo, her husband was 27

Mother to 8 children, 3 lived to adulthood; babies died age 1 day, 10 months and 14 months and twin girls born on the pioneer trail in Wyoming in Sept. 1848 died at birth

Died in Salt Lake City at age 66

Husband married two other plural wives in Utah

Of the original nuclear family of Joseph and Polly Knight with parents and 7 children, only 3 family members made it to Utah: Anna Knight DeMille, Joseph Knight, Jr., and Elizabeth Knight Johnson. Two more spouses of the original seven children, Lydia Knight and William Stringham, made it to Utah, bringing with them grandchildren of Polly and Joseph, Sr. Two grandchildren of Polly and Joseph Knight, Sr., came across the plains on their own: Newel and Sally's son, Samuel Knight, age 14, drove a team for Mr. Wixom, and came in 1847, and Polly and William Stringham's son, Walter Stringham, age 19, came in 1851 driving a freight wagon. Several other grandchildren were already married and came with spouses.

Joseph Smith and the Organization of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo

In early 1842, a small group of Latter-day Saint women in Nauvoo, Illinois, developed a proposal for a women's society that would provide clothing for the men building the temple in that city. The women provided a draft constitution and bylaws for the society to Joseph Smith, who praised the ideas but suggested "something better." On 17 March, he organized the women into a group called the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, stating that its purposes would include "looking to the wants of the poor," "searching after objects of charity," and "correcting the morals and strengthening the virtues of the female community." Emma Smith was elected the first president of the society, and she appointed two counselors. After the Relief Society was formed, Joseph Smith continued to take a personal interest in it, attending a total of nine official meetings and delivering six sermons to members of the group, all in the year 1842.

Society secretary Eliza R. Snow and other scribes kept minutes of Relief Society meetings from that organizational meeting through 16 March 1844, the last time the society met in Nauvoo. The minute book is published in its entirety on both the Joseph Smith Papers website (images, transcripts, and brief introduction) and the Church Historian's Press website (transcripts and extensive introduction and annotation). While the minute book is by far the most important record of Joseph Smith's interactions with the Relief Society, several other records also provide valuable information.

From the Joseph Smith papers.