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Sketch of the Life of Charles Wilkinson

Utah Pioneer of 1865

Prepared by his son Joseph T. Wilkinson

For Cedar City Camp, Cedar City, Utah

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Charles Wilkinson, 11th son of Joseph Wilkinson and Mary Muldrew, who was born in Ireland, was born in the town of Gerton, Nottinghamshire, England on the 11th day of October A. D. 1815. His parents were industrious, honest people who had the respect and good will of their neighbors.

Joseph Wilkinson, the father of Charles Wilkinson, was a farm laborer and managed by constant effort to earn sufficient of feed and clothe his numerous family, but in the matter of education he was able to do but little. He did his best however in this respect, and being a God fearing man he early instilled into their minds a respect for the Deity and a love of morality, honesty and justice which was far as Charles was concerned formed a solid foundation for character during all his after life.

At an early age Charles entered what was in that country called farmer's service. For a number of years he labored hard, earning little more than sufficient to feed and clothe himself. Being desirous of doing something more remunerative than this sort of labor, he took advantage of the offer of his brother-in-law, Thomas Rose, who was a wheelwright, and apprenticed himself to Rose to learn that trade. With his characteristic industry and perseverance he applied himself to his new vocation, and, although he began his career as tradesman, later in life than it was customary for apprentices to begin, he was a proficient workman as soon as the most of them.

It now became necessary to seek a wider field of labor in which to exercise his talent as a mechanic. For the little town in which Mr. Rose lived did not furnish sufficient employment for both. Charles

therefore in company with a relative of his master's started out in search of a place in which to live and work at his trade. Charles's companion, William Rose, wanted to go to London while Charles wanted to go to Manchester where he had a brother living at the time. As neither was willing to yield to the other in the matter, Charles proposed that they would stand a stick upright in the road, and if, upon letting go of it, it fell nearer the direction of London than Manchester he would yield to Rose and go with him, but if it fell nearer to Manchester, Rose should consent to go there. This plan of settlement being agreed upon, Charles placed the stick in position, and leaning the stick a little toward Manchester, he had no trouble in getting his friend, Rose, to go with him. Arriving in Manchester, he soon secured employment at reasonably remunerative prices. In the meantime while visiting at his brother's house who by the way was a benedict, he met his future wife, although it was not a case of love at first sight. Charles was considered at the time rather handsome and he was quite a favorite among the fair sex and had many opportunities of marriage, had he sought to improve them.

But as the young lady in question was a great favorite with Charles' sister-in-law, and consequently a frequent visitor, their acquaintance soon became a very intimate one, and in a short time ripened into love, resulting in the marriage of Charles Wilkinson to Sarah Hughes, on the 1st day of May, A.D. 1846. Charles was in many respects very fortunate in his choice of a wife. Miss Hughes was an affectionate, obedient, intelligent and refined woman, but in one respect, she was unfortunate in that she possessed a very weak body. She was born May 15, 1815.

Soon after his marriage, Charles conceived the idea of having a wheelwright shop of his own, and with this end in view, he rented a Railway arch in the City of Manchester, near what was then called Little Ireland.

Here for several years, he struggled hard to make a living for his family, which had by this time increased to four in number, and was composed of his wife Sarah, son Joseph Thomas, and daughters Sarah Jane and Mary, but finally he was compelled by misfortunes in business dishonesty of debtors and ill-health in his family to sell out his business and again seek work by the day for a living.

His change of employment resulted in good, and he soon found himself in more prosperous circumstances than he had been since his marriage. Mrs. Wilkinson was a woman of deep religious feeling, and during the years that had elapsed since her marriage, she had frequently urged upon Charles the need of joining some of the religions of the day. He had promised her that as soon as their financial condition was improved enough to free his mind from the constant strain that was upon it, he would visit some of the religious denominations and seek salvation in their ranks.

His improved circumstances soon gave him leisure to perform his promise, and his early training at the hands of his good father, coupled with the renewed entreaties of his wife caused him at once to set about the good work. In search of salvation, Charles visited a number of the leading sects of the day, but to his astonishment, none of them seemed to have the gospel. As I have before said, his Father was a God-fearing man, well skilled in scriptural knowledge, and although he never had heard of the Gospel of Jesus Christ of former day Saints, and his views of the Gospel were very much in accord therewith. Charles was somewhat familiar with his Father's Views, and he unconsciously applied them as a test in his religious researches. After investigating and listening to the doctrines of sects above mentioned, he came to the conclusion that the scriptures were a better rule of faith than any of the systems he had seen, and he resolved he would not join any of them, but would spend his Sabbath at home reading the scriptures and

associating with his family.

About this time, there came to work at the same shop at which Charles worked, a blacksmith by the name of Samuel Reese. They soon became acquainted, and it was not long until their conversations took a religious turn. Charles told Reese of his search after the gospel

"Come and hear us," said Reese.

"What denomination do you belong to?" asked someone.

"The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints."

Charles was both shocked and amused at the reply, "The Church of Latter Day Devils, you mean." However, his curiosity was aroused, and he determined to hear the new sect, although he was resolved that he would not gratify his fellow workman by letting him know of his determination. In the meantime, he was a most determined opposer of the doctrine Mr. Reese advocated.

The time soon came for Charles to attend the Services of the Latter Day Saints, and he went. He was convinced after hearing that first sermon that they had the only true gospel. He found their church to be the exact counterpart of the one the Savior had upon the earth in his day, in every particular, both as regards organizations, ordinances, principles and power.

But Satan was on the alert. He was not going to allow any desertion if he could help it, and although he could not prevent the convincing in this case, he could appeal to the pride of the individual.

"What?" said he. "Will you give up to Reese after all? What will your fellow workmen say after the way you have acted and ridiculed him?"

It cost him great effort to put these reflections aside and ally himself with those whom he knew to be the people of God, but he did so, and about the month of September A.D. 1854, he was baptized by Brother Edward Oliver. His faithful wife was abreast of him in the good work, and was baptized at the same time and by the same person. It was not long after joining the Church in the nations of the earth before the

spirit of the Gathering began to operate upon the converts, and Charles was no exception to the rest. He soon began to want to go to Zion. But how to raise the means to emigrate was the question that seemed unlikely to be able to solve for a long time to come. He was only a poor man, with no funds on hand, and his new religion seemed to rather render his chances for saving money less than greater, for he had tithing and donations to pay now in addition to all expenses he had had to meet before joining.

While puzzling over the ways and means of gathering with the Saints, Apostle F. D. Richards, who then presided over the British Mission, visited the Manchester Conference, and preached a stirring discourse upon the subject of the Gathering, advising every one to make the attempt who possibly could, telling them to sell even their old rocking chairs and family heirlooms and convert them into cash to help to pay their expenses Zionward.

Now Brother Wilkinson had for some little time before joining the Church been devoting all his energies to the fitting up of a very nice, comfortable home, and, having been blessed with good health and remunerative employment, he had succeeded in gathering together a very nice lot of furniture. The remark of President Richards therefore came to him with peculiar force and significance, for upon reflection he began to see that the sale of his valuable furniture would put him in possession of means enough to nearly pay his fare to America.

Before leaving, however, he proceeded to put into execution a desire that had been actuating him ever since he had obeyed the Gospel, namely, to visit his relatives, and acquaint them with the plan of salvation, for he could not help thinking that what was of so much value to him, must of necessity be very welcome tidings to them also. But he found upon visiting them that they all manifested no disposition to embrace the truth, that although they were glad to see him, yet they had no love for the message he bore, and looked with disapproval upon

his intention to gather with the Saints.

He returned to his home feeling the force of the words of scripture, "I will take them two of a family and one of a city."

He was quite successful in disposing of his household effects, and ere many weeks had passed, he was ready to bid adieu to his native land, and travel far over ocean waves and desert plains for the sake of his religion.

About the first of November A. D. 1855, Charles and his wife and three children sailed for America on the ship Emerald Isle, and after a passage of about 30 days, during the whole of which he and the whole family suffered severely from sea sickness, they landed in New York on the 30th of November. They had the experience common to immigrants at Castle Gardens, and then they launched forth in the New World without funds to make a livelihood. It was an unfavorable season of the year, and for awhile starvation was almost staring them in the face, but thanks to the every watchful care of the Almighty, made manifest through the instrumentality of kind friends, Charles was enabled to obtain work, after a struggle of about six weeks, and at once he began the task of saving means to help him to continue his journey to the "Valley," as the gathering place of the Saints was affectionately called.

By close economy, and the blessing of God, he was enabled in the early summer of 1856 to again resume his journey, this time with the hopes of reaching Iowa City, which was then the starting point for Latter Day Saints crossing the Plains to Utah, depending on the Lord opening up the way for him to go the rest of the Journey. A new way of crossing the plains was about to be tried, and Charles was anxious to be one of the experimentors. The famous hand cart company was to start from the frontiers to the home of the Saints in the far West.

While enroute from New York to Iowa, Brother Wilkinson and family encountered the hatred and opposition of the enemy of all rightness in a very marked degree. The two older children were taken very sick

and much of the journey was made with the eldest child in an unconscious condition. The train reached Iowa City in the evening too late for Bro. Wilkinson to get his family and effects moved to the Camp of the Saints, which was about one mile from town, and as he was destitute of funds, having expended his all in the purchase of his ticket to this place, an old broken railway car was the best refuge he could obtain for his wife and little ones, and very thankful he was to be able to obtain so good a shelter.

During that never to be forgotten night, the weary parents were weakened from a sleep of utter exhaustion by the voice of their youngest darling, calling in agonizing tones for a drink.

A light was struck by the father in order to see to get water for the little one, as soon as the rays fell upon the little sufferer, it wrung from the agonized Mother the exclamation, "My God, the child is struck with death!" It was indeed to true. Before nine o'clock the next morning, little Mary who the day before had been well, was a corpse, and the distracted Mother, alone, save for the company of her husband and sick little ones, in a strange land, was obliged to perform the last sad rites preparatory to laying the little one in the earth with her own hands.

Brother Wilkinson sought his brethren at the camp, and with their aid, the little body was laid in the grave. A day or two passed away, during which the afflicted family were moved to the camp of the Saints when Sarah Jans, the remaining daughter likewise passed to the spirit land. An opening was made for her in the grave of her sister, and together they lie waiting for day when the trumpet of the Mighty Angel shall wake them from their sleeping dust to life immortal. It would seem that Brother and Sister Wilkinson had now been sufficiently tried in the furnace of affliction for one time at least, but God's ways are not man's ways, and he doeth all things for the best. The eldest child was still very ill, and his life was despaired of all, or nearly

all who saw him. His tongue was eaten in holes with canker, and the Scarlet Fever was burning in his veins. Well meaning people from the city near-by urged the parents to have the services of a doctor, offering to pay for his services, was the parents were without means to do so, but Brother and Sister Wilkinson preferred to put their trust in God and in the Holy ordinances of His House. The Elders came frequently, and administered to the little fellow, and he had the most unbounding faith in their administrations. While affairs were in this condition, Bro. Wilkinson, himself, was stricken down, and so vigorous was the onslaught of the destroyer that the strong, healthy man was soon reduced to a state of utter helplessness.

One day as his faithful wife sat by his bedside, watching and weeping as the flickering spark of life seemed to come and go, he roused from his lethargy, and speaking her name in stronger tones than he had seemed able to do, he told her he was going to die, gave her directions with regard to their sick boy, recommended her to be faithful and to make her way to the home of the Saints as soon as she could, asked her to kiss him, which she tearfully did, bade her goodby, and sank back dead, dead to all human appearances. How long he remained in that condition, I have no means of knowing, but he was aroused from it by the weeping voice of his wife, calling upon the Lord in prayer, and telling him that she could not spare her loved husband, that everything she had was upon the altar, but she was so much grieved, for he had no recollection of the affecting scene through which she had just passed. She recited to him the words which he had said to her, and what had followed, "Well," he said, "The Lord has heard your prayers, for while I lay here just now, the angels came to me and laid their hands upon my head, and blessed me in the Name of Lord, and told me I should recover." Soon after, two of the Elders approached the tent where Bro. Wilkinson was lying, he saw them through the open door, and exclaimed, "There are the two angles that I saw a short time since."

The Elders came in, laid their hands upon his head, and used the same language, and make him the same promise that the Heavenly visitants had done previously. From that time he began to mend, and ere long was restored to health, though it was many weeks before he had his usual strength. In the meantime, the boy was also recovering, due as the Saints who saw him were all agreed in saying, to his great faith.

The time was now arrived for the Saints to begin their journey across the Great Plains, a distance of twelve or thirteen hundred miles with the hand carts. Brother Wilkinson, who it will be remembered was a wheelwright by trade, as soon as his strength would allow, was busy helping to make the hand carts, and as company after company rolled out, his spirits sank lower and lower, for he felt that his chance of getting to the Valley were becoming very slender indeed. Finally, the last hand cart was finished, the last emigrant fitted out, and the last Hand Cart company rolled out of the Iowa camp ground, enroute for the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, and Bro. Wilkinson was left alone upon the camp ground, I said alone, but that is not quite correct, for a few of the leading Brethern were left, whose business it was to attend to the dispatching of the different companies.

As Bro. Wilkinson was disconsolately reflecting upon the events I have been harrating, he was approached by one of these Brethern who said, "Bro. Wilkinson, can you be prepared to start immediately for the Valley?"

"Certainly," was the reply.

"Have you had any experience in driving oxen?"

"No, but I understand driving horses."

"Well, we have here a wagon loaded with books belonging to Apostle F.D. Richards, drawn by four yoke of Oxen. Will you undertake to drive it?"

"Yes Sir," was the unhesitating reply.

Everything was soon in readiness, and within thirty-six hours

after the hand cart company, under the command of Capt. Edward Martin left the Iowa Camp Ground, Bro. Wilkinson and his family were in pursuit with the Ox team above mentioned. He found that driving oxen and driving horses were two very different affairs. He had not gone a dozen miles before his wagon capsized. At his first camp, where he was alone with the exception of his wife and child, he was obliged to turn out his team to graze with the yokes of them for they were all young and almost unbroken.

There he had one yoke of his cattle stolen, but he tracked them and found the thief, and by the aid of the two Brethren, whom he fetched from the camp near Iowa City, he compelled them to give up the oxen.

No further adventure of note befell him at this stage of his journey and he overtook the company in a day or two, it having been delayed. And in their company traveled to Florence, Nebraska, where the journey began in good earnest. Heretofore, the country had been partially settled, but from this on, it was one unbroken wilderness.

Of the trials and troubles of that eventful period, I shall say but little, though to record the half of its tragedy would require volumes. Brother Wilkinson soon saw the wisdom of the servants of the Lord in not allowing him to pull a hand cart. In his weak condition, he would not have been able to have gone half the way.

The Emigrants were very late in starting, and long before the Journey was accomplished, the frosts began. The carts were poorly made, and over-loaded, and it was found, when too late, that provisions enough could not be hauled on them. Very little luggage was allowed to be taken and all was done that could be done to make amends for the unwise start and bad management, but these remedies came too late.

Sister Wilkinson, who, as I have said before, was a weak woman, seemed to get stronger as she journeyed, and she was able to walk many miles of the road during the first part of the journey. But one eventful evening, a short time before the going down of the sun, she was compelled, in common with numbers of others, to wade waist deep in the cold

waters of the last crossing of the Platte River. Her husband had placed her in his wagon, but a Captain of one of the Companies had ordered her out to wade as others had to do. The first snow fall that night, and it was dark before the camp fires were lighted. Her remark to her husband that night was, "I have caught my death in that river." It was too true. She who had stood when her husband and children were falling around her, became an invalid from that night, and in six weeks after entering the Valley passed away.

And now the trials crowded fast upon the unfortunate Saints. Short rations, cold weather, jaded trains, and worn bodies soon began to thin the ranks of the Company, so that it is stated that out of a total of 600 persons who left Iowa Camp, only 450 lived to reach their destination. On the last day of November 1856, the remnant of that ill-starred company reached Salt Lake City. And as it is the history of Bro. Wilkinson and not of the company that I am writing, I shall not enter into details with regard to the privations they endured, nor give an account of the noble deliverance that was sent them from the "Valley", in the shape of teams and supplies, without which they would all have assuredly perished on the plains.

As Brother Wilkinson and his wife and child stood by the Wall of the temple block, in Salt Lake City, on Sunday November 30th, 1856 having just arrived and left the teams which had brought them in, their emaciated and hungry appearance excited the pity of some kind hearted sister, who was passing, and she put into the hand of the thin, pale little boy a piece of bread. A quarter of a pound of flour per day per person had been the ration upon which the Emigrants had been living, and it is superfluous to say that it was starvation feeding. Never was food more welcome, never did the "staff of life" taste more sweet than did that slice of bread. It was quickly divided amongst the three, and dispatched with greedy haste by at least two of them, for it had been the care of the devoted husband to save as much of their scanty rations

for his invalid wife as she could be prevailed upon to eat, often concealing from her the fact that which he offered her was the intire ration of the three.

The entry of the Emigrants had been expected, and soon the Bishops God's chosen servants to administer to his poor, were on hand in the line of their duty.

Bro. Wilkinson and family fell to the lot of Bishop Thomas Callister of the 17th Ward in Salt Lake City, and was by him assigned to the kind care of Bro. Joseph L. Heywood's family. Brother Wilkinson was very fortunate in this matter, his wife's condition was very critical, requiring the best of care and attention, and Sister Serepta Heywood was a woman of rare care and ability and sweetness of disposition; in a word, was one of God's noblest and best Daughters. She devoted herself with thresless energy, wisely applied, to the nursing and care of the invalid.

About a week afterwards, at the direction of Bishop Callister, Bro. Wilkinon and his little son went to Provo to live, leaving the sick mother and wife in the kind care of Sister Heywood. But he could not rest easy away from her, knowing how very ill she was, and soon made his way back to her, and as she continued to grow worse, he returned to Provo for the boy in order that the poor Mother might see him before death, which all who saw her knew was not far off. The snow was lying upon the ground to the depth of several inches as Bro. Wilkinson left Provo on the morning of a cold day in December, leading his nine year old boy by the ned to walk to Salt Lake City, a distance of 50 miles. They traveled laboriously on, passing inroute Battle Creek, American Fork and finally reaching Lehi about three o'clock in the afternoon.

After getting dinner, Bro. Wilkinson's anxiety for his dying wife compelled them to resume their tiresome journey, but as they advanced to the North, the snow which had been six inches deep, now grew deeper and the hitherto will beaten track to a few foot prints in the snow-

buried road. To add to their discomfort, the North wind blew cold and heavily in their faces. After going two or three miles, the little fellow's strength began to wane, and his courage deserted him and he begged his Father to heave him, and let him lie down on the road he was so tired. Bro. Wilkinson knew that to stop under those circumstances for more than a few minutes would be to court great danger, if not death, and therefore after allowing him to rest a few minutes he again urged him to proceed. But it seemed in vain, nature was apparently exhausted and the tired lad seemed incapable of further effort. What was the distracted Father to do? He was already carrying as much as he was able, and with the snow 12 inches deep, and the nearest shelter 5 miles distant, his case seemed almost desperate.

Turning to the boy, he said, "If you do not get up and come along I will whip you to death." Although a kind father, he was also a strict one, and poor boy was struck with terror at the threatening words of his parent.

Taking the proffered hand of his Father, he rose to his feet and struggled wearily onward, and as he moved his stiffening joints became more supple, the stagnant blood began to circulate, and before long a genial warmth began to pervade his half-frozen body, and although very weary, he was able to trudge on the remaining five miles, at the end of which a warm fire, supper and a bed caused him to forget his troubles in that sweet sleep which is childhood's heritage.

Next morning, betimes, they were again on their way, and in early evening they reached their destination. About the middle of January 1857, Sister Wilkinson died, and the afflicted husband who had left England 13 or 14 months previously with a happy family had none left but the boy.

In the spring of 1857, Bro. Wilkinson went south to Nephi, then called Salt Creek, to farm on shares for Bro. Jos. L. Haywood. He put in a large area of land, but reaped no crop, as the grasshoppers took

it all. In the fall of the same year, he married Miss Jane Bentham, a young lady who had come over with the season's emigration. Miss Bentham was a good young woman, industrious, economical and affectionate, and made a good wife to the afflicted widower, and a kind mother to his son.

Although Bro. Wilkinson had lost his crop, he did not despair, but went to work at his trade with a will, and by the time winter set in, he had obtained a piece of land in what was then known as the fort, and built an adobe house, thereon. To be sure, the roof was a covering of poles with straw, but it was his own, the first home of which he had been the landlord.

Utah was invaded that fall by what is known in history as Johnson's Army, but they were not permitted to enter the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. The Canyons were guarded to prevent them from coming in by the Salt Lake Militia. Among those who were called upon by Gen'l Wells to perform this duty was Bro. Wilkinson, as had been the case with him all his life, he was on hand to perform his duty, but as the patriot ranks were sufficiently strong without his aid, he was excused.

The Spring and Summer of 1858 were reasonably prosperous ones for Brother Wilkinson, and by earnest industry, he was able to add to his possessions considerably, so that he was considered, for the times in which lived, tolerably well off. But that winter, a severe misfortune befell him in the death of his wife, who died in giving birth to an infant son, who also died. This son was christened Charles Thomas.

Left a widower for the second time, Bro. Wilkinson felt indeed that his lot was a hard one, but by putting his trust in God, he continued to strive to do his duty. During the lifetime of his second wife, and through her instrumentality, he made the acquaintance of Mrs Ruth Keyser of Salt Lake City.

This lady was the plural wife of Bro. G. H. Keyser. Mrs Keyser subsequently secured a divorce from Bro. Keyser, and afterward

Wilkinson. The marriage was an unfortunate one, as the parties were not suited to each other, and resulted in disagreement, and finally a legal separation. They had one child, a daughter christened Ruth Elizabeth, but when the Mother returned to and re-married her first husband, Mr. Keyser, the daughter was re-christened Rebecca Harriet, but she went by the name of Wilkinson. She was born Nov. 26, 1860.

During the time this union lasted, a period of about 1½ years, beginning in the Spring of 1859, and ending in the Fall of 1861, Bro. Wilkinson's good fortune in financial matters seemed to have deserted him, and although he worked hard he could make no headway. In the Spring of 1861, he was called to cross the Plains to help to gather the poor, and went in capacity of night guard.

In January of 1862, he married Miss Ann Denton, late of the British Isles. She was born in Bradford, England, Oct. 12, 1837. They lived in Nephi for a few years, where a daughter, Rebeccah Ann Wilkinson Angell was born to them December 20, 1863. They then moved to the Muddy (St. Thomas) in Arizona. A son -----was born, who died in infancy. The family then moved to St. George where Ann Denton Wilkinson died of bilious fever, Aug. 5, 1866.

About 1860, Charles Wilkinson made a trip to Salt Lake City in a two wheeled cart drawn by one horse, accompanied by his little five year old daughter, Rebecca Ann. He worked there all summer, and each morning he had to pass the residence of a Swedish woman convert, Mrs. Anna Maria Blom, who lustily at her work. He often greeted her by saying, "You are merry this morning," and she in her ignorance of the English language was so indignant because she thought he was asking her to marry him on such short acquaintance. However, she did marry him in September, and he took her to St. George where she had the first home she had ever owned. She was born in Sweden April 30th, 1830. She reared the girl, Rebeccah Ann, and was always a wonderful housekeeper, and kind and charitable to all. About four years later, in 1872, Charles Wilkinson married Maria Elizabeth Anderson, who was

born in Denmark, December 13th, 1833.

With his family he moved to Leeds about 1874. Here he worked at his trade of wheelwright, and prospered considerably. He built a nice home, occupied prominent positions in his ward, was ordained a High Priest in 1880, did considerable Temple work, although living out a well-rounded life. He died December 28, 1890, and was buried in Leeds.