

BENJAMIN THOMAS CLARKE (1799-1867)

Benjamin Thomas Clark was born on 20 February 1799 in Cambridge, England to Thomas Benjamin Clark and Elizabeth Eusden Bell. He was the fourth of five children and the only boy. His siblings were Elizabeth, Martha, Frances and Sarah. Cambridge is a large town and Benjamin's father was an office clerk in one of the many businesses located there. Benjamin was a member of a Methodist congregation where he was choirmaster.

Falling in love with Ann Shuker he had her initials 'A S' tattooed over his heart. At age 21 he married Ann Leaford Shuker at the Holy Sepulchre Anglican Church in Cambridge on 25 September 1820. Their first son, Thomas Benjamin, was born on 23 November 1820 and was baptized at three weeks old at St. Peter's Anglican Church on Castle Street in Cambridge. Joseph John was born on 4 August 1822 in Cambridge and was baptized 25 days later at St. Giles' Anglican Church, Castle Street. At the time of his baptism they were living at Wrays Lane, Castle End Cambridge. A daughter Elizabeth was baptized on 21 October 1823 and her father was according to the baptismal records working as a servant in one of the homes. A son John born on 13 October 1825 was baptized at St. Clements Church and died shortly thereafter. Benjamin was working then as a postal boy.

Daughter Ann was born on 15 August 1826 and baptized 21 days later at St. Giles' Church while her family lived at Gloucester Lane. Another Daughter Frances was born 3 April 1828 and baptized 12 days later at St. Giles' Church. They were again living on Wray's Lane. Charles Jonas was born on 20 September 1830 and baptized 21 days later whilst they were living on Gloucester Lane. After Charles, came Martha born on 18 January 1832, William Bell born on 6 August 1834 and Benjamin Thomas born on 2 February 1836.

In 1837/8 the family moved to Chesterton just one and ¼ miles northeast of Cambridge. It was a smaller town with the remains of Cambridge Castle, and the river Cam running through it. It was surely a relief to move out of the city into relative countryside. Benjamin took a job there working in a brickyard as a brick burner and they took up residence at Johnson's Hall. They had three more children there: Susannah born on 15 June 1838, Susannah Shuker born on 6 December 1841 and Caroline born on 28 April 1845.

His wife Ann died on 24 June 1848 and was buried at Fulbourn, Cambridgeshire. Benjamin was left with seven children still living at home. About this time Benjamin learned of a new religion, which was causing quite a stir among the people. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (The Mormons) made its way into Benjamin's life and on 26 December 1849 he was baptized a member. Possibly the concept of 'eternal marriage' and 'forever a family' made an important impression on him as he had just lost his wife.

On June 25 1850 Benjamin married again to Ann Southwell Seymour, a widow. She had been married to William Seymour and had one child, Charles William Seymour. She became a dressmaker after her first husband died and continued in this after she and Benjamin were married. They had three children together. The first was named Lorenzo Southwell (14 May 1852) born in Chesterton.

They decided to emigrate and go to America to join the other Saints in the Utah Valley of Salt Lake. On 23 January 1853 they left Liverpool on the ship 'Golconda' along with 321 other people bound for America. Travelling together were Benjamin and his wife Ann, were his son Joseph and his wife Ann, his daughter Elizabeth with her husband George Handle and small daughter Elizabeth (1 year old), his daughter Ann and her husband Joseph Owen Onion Clark with their daughter Mary Ann (5 years) and son George (3 years), his son Benjamin (16 years), daughters Susan (12 years), Caroline (7 years), Ann's son Charles William (12 years) and their new son Lorenzo now 5 months old.

After six weeks on the ocean the Golconda arrived at the mouth of the Mississippi River. There they waited for twelve days before a steam tug could tow her to New Orleans, Louisiana and they could disembark on 26 March 1853. They came up the Missouri River by steamer to Koebuk, Iowa where they joined the Cyrus H. Wheelock Wagon train heading west. They left Iowa with 400 people and 52 wagons on 1 June 1853. They again camped near the Missouri River for 40 days and finally on 11 July they left for the Great Salt Lake Valley.

Upon arriving in Salt Lake on 6 October 1853 they spent the first winter in a dugout in the banks of the gulch made by Parley's stream in the vicinity of the present Sugar House district. The next year Benjamin purchased ten acres of small farm land in the Big Field Survey and built a large commodious adobe dwelling. Homemade furniture was provided for their needs and comfort, made by Benjamin who had brought with him a chest of the finest carpentry tools available. He was skilled in making bricks and tiles and had knowledge of veterinary care. He followed all three of these trades and as a landholder he became a farmer. He was always devoted to his family and had brought as many from England as would come. The whole family lived together in the large adobe dwelling until the married couples could get a start and set up house independently. They were a musical family always entertaining and happy with each other. Immigrants from England, whom they had never seen before were welcome in this spacious home as if they were dear old friends. He and Ann were endowed and sealed in the Endowment House on 11 October 1855.

On 28 June 1857 he entered a polygamist marriage with Ruth Butterworth Briggs. Ruth was born on 23 April 1817 in Middleton, Lancashire and was converted and joined the LDS Church in 1840 during the proselytizing mission of the twelve apostles. Ruth and her husband John Briggs immigrated to America and crossed the plains with the Edward Martin Handcart Company (5th Company) in 1856. Their family consisted of seven children. Due to a late start across the American plains, the company was caught in early winter snows and almost all perished before they could reach the safety of the Salt Lake Valley. John Brigg's died in that terrible tragedy at Devil's Gate, Wyoming on 3 November 1856 just a few days after Captain Grant's advance rescue party

came to their assistance. Two of the children also perished on the trail before arriving in Salt Lake City. (Thomas age 13 on 11 November near Split Rock, Wyoming and Mary age 7 on 29 November in the Wasatch mountains, just one day before the company's arrival in the Salt Lake Valley. Ruth now faced a terrible dilemma with five surviving children probably with permanent damage from the freezing conditions they had experienced and no husband to support the family in this new desert environment. It was common practice after this tragedy for Church authorities to ask faithful and established LDS men to take the widows and orphans into polygamous unions. It was not long before Benjamin was asked to take Ruth as a third wife. To them one daughter, Lavina Alice was born in 1858. Ruth died two years later on 4 August 1860 at age 43, perhaps as a consequence of her ordeal on the plains as so many like her ultimately did. Ann Southwell may have taken Ruth's children into her care at this time. What a mixture of families this must have been. In 1858 he took up farming, raising stock and building homes in Spanish Fork.

He also married Martha Larkins on 3 March 1866 in Salt Lake. She had been born in Cambridge and was 44 years old, but little is known of her life. No mention was made of any children from this union.

Benjamin Thomas Clark died a year and a half after this last marriage on 4 November 1867 and was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery, Salt Lake City, Utah. Also buried in that plot are Ann Southwell Seymour Clark born 18 September 1815, died 7 June 1897 and Emma Briggs, born 8 August 1855, died 20 October 1869, daughter of his third wife. Emma's mother and father were buried elsewhere and were not living at the time of her death.

[Most of this story is taken from an article on the 'Children to the Fathers' website, but has been edited by Paul Fiddian – September, 2015]