

A Short Sketch of the Life of Mary Elizabeth Knight Bassett

Mary E. Bassett, Daughter of Joseph and Betsy Covert Knight, was born in Gallatin Township, Clay County, Missouri, June 16, 1836. Her parents, having joined the Church before their marriage, she was baptized when eight years of age in the Mississippi River in Nauvoo. She was but nine years of age when the Saints were driven out of their homes by the mob in the fall of the year. While waiting for the ferry boat to take them across the river, she remembers



About 1887

one of the mob seizing one of the Saints who had returned for something and immersing him in the water, in the "name of "Old Joe Smith", saying that such would be the penalty for all that came back for anything. Brother Knight remained until the last company left, looking after the poor. He was acting bishop under Bishop Hunter, who went with the first company. They remained on the banks of the Mississippi until teams came back after them. They were in an almost starving condition, and some were out searching for food (while others were sick and faint for want of food), when the incident of the quails, which they considered a miracle, happened. The sky began to darken like a great black cloud, and hundreds of quail alighted in the camp, and were so tame that they could be easily picked up by hand. During the battle of Nauvoo, a sister Bassett, and mother, and sisters Rhoda C. Moore and Martha A. Mills made the bags to hold the missiles (which consisted of scraps of iron) for the cannon. Joseph Knight (Jr.), sister Bassett's (Mary's) father, her grandfather Joseph Knight Sr., and his brother, Newel Knight, were close friends of the Prophet even before the organization of the Church. Joseph Knight Sr. used to take the provisions to the Prophet while he was translating the Book of Mormon. Sister Bassett's father sold a piece of property at Kirtland (Ohio), the proceeds of which he gave to the Prophet.

After remaining about three weeks on the banks of the Mississippi they left for Winter Quarters, but on arriving at the banks of the Missouri they found it frozen, so they could not ferry over, and the ice wasn't firm enough to hold up the wagons. They had to winter there, and they called the place Ferryville. There were no mills and no way of

grinding corn, so they lived mostly on hulled corn. Early in the spring, they left for Winter Quarters and stayed there until the Saints left for the West. Her father and family went to Kaneshville (now called Council Bluffs), where they stayed until they earned an outfit to cross the plains. They left there in the summer of 1850 with two teams consisting of one yoke of oxen and one yoke of cows. At night, camp was made by the wagons being formed in a circle, where they made their evenings as pleasant as possible by dancing, singing, and reading etc. There was a circumstance Sister Bassett still remembers, and that was the running away of an oxen team, killing a lady by the name of Whitesides. She was buried on the plains, but the grief stricken husband returned to St. Louis with his children. They were three months on the road, arriving in the valley on September 12, 1850. Brother Knight's teamster died with cholera while on the way.

They located in the old fort, where there were a number of adobe houses with dirt roofs, surrounded by little gardens. Brigham Young had a house situated on the north bench, which was considered quite fine for those days, and it was called the "White House". They had very plain food to eat and very plain clothes to wear. Some fine dresses were made from dyed wagon covers.

Sister Bassett was married to Charles H. Bassett March 1853 in the old Council House by Orson Hyde. She is the mother of nine children, six of whom are living: Mary E. Rodeback, born in S. L. City June 9, 1854; Melvie A. Glines, born July 28, 1856; W. H. Bassett, born March 14, 1858; Ernest K., born June 13, 1861; Ruby R. Ashworth, born May 13, 1871; and Lois K. (Gatrell), born April 13, 1879. She has great faith in the gospel and has many testimonies. The healing of her eyes, some years ago, she considers one of the greatest. An occultist told her that she would become totally blind with cataracts on both eyes and would have to undergo an operation to recover her sight. She exercised a great deal of faith by prayer and working in the temple – and now, over 78 years of age, she is able to read.

She was acquainted with Brigham Young, met him at socials and dances many times, her husband and father being intimately acquainted with him. She has heard Brigham Young prophecy and seen his prophecies fulfilled.

One sad incident of her life was the robbing of the grave of her seven month old baby boy. She recovered the clothes in the early sixties.

Note:

The author of this sketch is unknown, but was copied from a handwritten document by Nadene J. Gatrell, wife of Gordon G. Gatrell (son of Lois Knight Bassett Gatrell), in 1992.

Because of the reference to her age in the comment about her eyes being healed, it is probable the original material from Mary Elizabeth was from about 1914.

The original history must have been written prior to the death of Lois in June 1947, as she was the last of those listed as "living" to die.

Edited for trivial spelling and punctuation changes, parenthetical items added for clarification, and placed in digital format by Stanley D. Hansen March 3, 2007.