

John Hirst & Charlotte Brook:

Mormon Pioneers

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Combined with additions by Julie Robinson Smith 2009

John HIRST was born on 7 January (or March) 1816 in the village of Slaithwaite, near Huddersfield, Yorkshire, England. John was the only son of Abraham HIRST and Nancy SYKES. Abraham and Nancy lived off of their land in the picturesque little farming and factory community. John remained on the farm working with his parents until he was twenty-three years old. He then acquired a small farm of his own in Slaithwaite and it was to this cottage that John brought his lovely bride, to begin their new life together.

John's bride was nineteen year-old Charlotte BROOK, the daughter of William (or George) BROOK and Hannah BOTTOMLEY. John and Charlotte exchanged sacred vows of matrimony on 5 November 1837. This fortunate couple was blessed with thirteen children: Abraham born 2 April 1838, James 31 March 1839, Harriet 10 June 1841, Hannah 12 January 1843, Nancy 15 November 1844, Eliza 21 February 1846, Mary 1 May 1848, Martha 15 June 1850, Fanny 10 May 1852, John Jr. 12 January 1855, Sarah 29 July 1857, Charlotte 9 December 1859, and Ellen 3 Feb 1862. The family experienced great joy and exceptional sorrow together. Some of their greatest mourning came when their first two boys, both Abraham and James died as infants, and again at the death of their darling seventeen year-old daughter Hannah.

Being naturally of a religious turn of mind, John readily conceded the rights of humble Elders who came to his village preaching the newly restored gospel of Jesus Christ in this Latter-day. He investigated the gospel message they preached and gladly accepted the truth as it was explained to him. Charlotte also welcomed these missionaries into their home and listened attentively to the story of the great Plan of Happiness. She was inspired by the news that the priesthood had been restored again to earth from heaven, so that families could be united eternally. Charlotte would have again her little lost boys and daughter to rear during the millennium! This message went straight to their hearts such that at Linthwaite, on 3 April 1852, Elder Johanthan Midgley baptized John Hirst a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Charlotte followed his example and entered the waters of baptism on 10 April 1852. Elder Wright Beaumont performed Charlotte's ordinance at Slaithwaite while Elder George C Reiser, another missionary, was a witness. John was also ordained a Priest in 1852 by Elder William Noble, and soon thereafter was ordained an Elder.

The Hirst family commenced to look forward to emigrating to Utah, the land of cherished hopes. With this end in view, all the children who were able to do so, worked in the cotton mills of Yorkshire and saved their hard-earned money towards the realization of their dream to gather with the Saints in the Rocky Mountains! For the next sixteen years John served as the Branch

President of his local congregation, the meetings for which were held at the Hirst home. Also John was called as a “home missionary and a traveling Elder” throughout England, during those long years of saving for emigration; throughout which time his cottage was always readily open to all missionaries. The Hirsts moved from Slaithwaite to Longwood, (which is also near Huddersfield), and finally to Todmorden; but despite transience, their hearth was never without welcomed guests in gospel association. Charles W. Penrose and many other prominent men of the church visited at the Hirst residences.

The Hirst girls were beautiful and active sisters. Because their parents were “Mormons” and due in part to the fact that church meetings were held in their home, the Hirst daughters had many trials of persecution to pass through. Their companions and friends began to shun them and mistreat them. To try to mollify this situation, the sister began to attend the Baptist Church, while their father held meetings at home. The girls were each in turn baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and supported their parents greatly by ultimately making it possible to emigrate to Zion as a family—the goal for which they each had been praying and working toward, for nearly two decades!

When the preparations to depart for America had been made and everything arranged the family experience an extreme mix of emotions. First they each were thrilled at the prospects of finally being able to go as a family to join with the Saints living near a prophet of God; yet they were also filled with despair at the realization that they would be separated from their beloved daughters Eliza Hirst Gledhill, Martha Hirst Taylor, and Harriet Hirst Marshall; since these dear siblings had married and needed to stay behind in England for the present. Eventually Eliza and Martha were able to also travel with their families to Utah, but the Marshall family did not relocate to the Rocky Mountain Region, despite the fact that Thomas, Harriet’s husband, did join the Church.

John, Charlotte, John Jr. (the only living brother), Hannah, Nancy (and her husband Mr. Dearden), Mary, Fanny, Sarah, Charlotte, and Ellen, all sailed from Liverpool on 20 June 1868 on the sailing vessel, “Emerald Isle”, bound for the Promised Land! The Emerald Isle was “and old fashioned packet of sailing variety”. John was fifty-two years-old and Charlotte, fifty. The children ranged in ages from twenty-five to six years-old. There were Eight-hundred seventy-six Saints on board ship under the leadership of Hans Jensen Hald. After only a few days journey it was discovered, to the consternation of all on board, that the apparatus used for filtering the drinking water was unserviceable, and this necessitated everyone drinking the water from the huge tanks in an unsanitary condition. This fact, coupled with the very restricted space and exceptionally crowded quarters, as well as the long tedious ocean journey of eight heart-breaking weeks, caused agonizing sickness to spread throughout the passengers. Almost every other day of the trip, someone died! The first to be lowered to a watery grave was a two-year old toddler. One particularly horrific day found the death’s toll at six! During the ensuing terrifying days the list of the departed mounted higher and higher until, appallingly thirty-seven souls lost their lives while on board and had to be buried at sea. Violent storms were encountered by the vessel practically the entire way across the Atlantic—all were at the complete mercy of violent waves for many days at a time. The voyage was so rough that it seemed as though the ship would be sunk.

Charlotte brought with her a sack of Chamomile flowers. She boiled the water her family drank mixed with these flowers making a kind of herbal tea which likely protected the health of her family during the journey. None of the Hirst family became ill. The Hirsts were additionally blessed and elated when their married daughter Nancy Dearden, gave birth to her first child while midway across the ocean. The infant was an adorable little girl, thus she was christened for the ship upon which she was born, and named "Emerald". They arrived safely in New York harbor the 11 August 1868, after fifty-six long treacherous days. The Emerald Isle then began a return trip which ended in tragedy as she sank-cargo, crew, and all-just within reach of its destination of England!

The exhausted traveler next boarded the train in New York and rode as far as Fort Bonton, the then terminus of the railroad line. Fort Bonton was about seven-hundred miles west of Omaha. The Hirst clan gratefully arrived there 25 August 1868. From this point on, the journey was made by ox-team and wagon under the direction of Captain Holman who had a company of men with teams and provisions ready to escort the newly arriving immigrant Saints to Utah. The company experience a great deal of sickness on the plains and many were left by the wayside after a hasty grave was dug, with a few leaves and brush put at the bottom of the grave, and over the top as the only markers. The Hirsts again mercifully avoided sickness and loss. Eleven-year-old Sarah however fell from the front of the moving wagon and was overrun, being badly bruised and sustaining a broken leg. After suffering many privations and much weary toil, the Hirst clan finally arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in October of 1868, four months after leaving Liverpool.

John and Charlotte settled their family on a ranch in Jordan, nine miles Northwest of Salt Lake City, belonging to Dr. W. F. Anderson and took the cattle there on shares. The first winter and spring found John also working on the railroad, which was under construction through Echo Canyon. The Hirsts stayed on the Jordan Ranch four years, and then homesteaded a beautiful farm of their own in Pleasant Green where they also raised cattle. Taking advantage of the home Homestead Act, John "took up" one-hundred sixty acres of land. He built a two-room frame house and moved in on 2 April 1873.

John Hirst was called to be the Bishop of the Pleasant Green branch by President Shoenfeldt of the Brighton Stake of which Pleasant Green was a part. John held therefore, the first religious meetings in the Pleasant Green, and served in his position of "Presiding Elder" until his death on 7 September 1878. Pleasant Green was located where the city of Magna, Utah is presently. John was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. George C Reiser, one of the missionaries that taught the Hirst family the gospel, spoke at John's funeral giving tribute to his devoted convert and friend who was a faithful and energetic minister of the gospel during all the long years of his exemplary life.

The Relief Society was organized in Pleasant Green the spring of 1879 by Eliza R Snow and Martha Horne Tingey. Charlotte Hirst was elected the first president-a position she held until her death on 28 June 1880. Charlotte loved her charitable work with the women of her area and would walk four miles rather than miss a meeting. It was said of her that, "she was a woman of the purest principles and greatest integrity. Wherever she went, she gained the good will of all her associates. She was faithful to her trust in visiting the sick, liberal to the poor, and a good

useful member of the ward in which she lived.” Charlotte was buried next to her husband in the Salt Lake Cemetery.

John and Charlotte Hirst and their children were members of the last group of Latter-day Saint emigrants that crossed the ocean in a sailing vessel, and the last company that crossed the plains by ox-team. The next company of Saints to cross the Atlantic came in a steamboat, and the railroad was completed to Ogden, Utah the following spring!