

WILLIAM JASPER HARRIS Jr.

a brief history by M. Afton Harris Felt

William Jasper Harris was a son of Zachariah and Emily Harris
born 25 October 1836 Geneva, Morgan County, Illinois

Zachariah Harris was born 4 April 1831 Pendleton District, So. Carolina
a son of Silas Harris and Jane Hill
He died 1841 Geneva, Morgan County, Illinois

Emily was born 25 November 1816
a daughter of Jehu and Martha "Pasty" Carlin Hill
She died 20 March 1882 Provo, Utah, Utah

The Harris and the Hill families were among the early settlers in Macoupin County, Illinois, where they homesteaded. Their families were pleased when Zachariah married his sweetheart Emily Hill on 6 March 1834.

They had a baby daughter, Artemissa, when they moved to Morgan County where Zachariah began a harness and grocery business. Their second child, a son, was born to them. He was named William Jasper Harris. They then had two little girls born to them, daughters, Martha Jane, and Mary Elizabeth.

In 1840 little Martha Jane died and Zachariah died of Consumption, in 1841 and shortly after his passing, Mary Elizabeth died leaving Emily, a widow with two small children.

She went to live with her older sister and her husband in Iowa. Her two older sisters had converted to Mormonism. They took her to hear the Prophet Joseph Smith speak. She felt the spirit and was and she was baptized 5th the winter of 1842.

Emily entered into plural marriage with Abraham Smoot on 8 January 1846. The following year they moved west in her husband's company arriving in the Salt Lake Valley September 1, 1847.

William walked across the plains, sometimes barefoot and thinly clad. The family settled in Salt Lake City. He worked on Smoot's farm until he received a mission call to England.

He and Martha Ann Smith became good friends and had strong feelings for each other. She was the daughter of Hyrum and Mary Fielding Smith. She was born 14 May 1841 Nauvoo, Hancock, Illinois. Martha's father, Hyrum, was martyred, June 27, 1844, along with his brother Joseph Smith Jr., who was the Mormon Prophet.

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Mary, brought Hyrum's children and some others who were part of her household and to Salt Lake City. (This trip is an inspirational story by its self.)

Martha Ann spent time at the Smoot farm helping William's mother get his clothing ready for his mission.. This news was difficult for Martha, for she had lost her mother when she was eleven years old and now the person she was closest too was leaving. She looked on this to be another trying experience to part with the one who had won heart. Now she felt that she would be alone again. Her brother Joseph Fielding Smith was on a mission when he in Hawaii and that seemed like it had been forever since she had seen him, and now William would be leaving.

She was helping William's mother, Emily Harris Smoot, get his clothing ready for his mission, since she was handy with a needle and wanted to help. There was so much to do, socks needed to be knit, brown home spun clothes made, provisions and bedding needed to be made ready.

The day he reported at the Endowment House, to receive his blessings and to be set apart as a missionary, President Young asked the missionaries who were l leaving, "Have you a young lady that you think enough o to marry?"

William said "Yes"

President Young said, "Go bring her here right and be married before you go."

That afternoon Martha was surprised when William came rushing in the house and said, "Get your sun bonnet, Martha, and come with me. We are going to get Married"

Martha turned to his mother and said almost breathlessly, "What shall I do."

"Law me, Honey", said his mother, "put on your calico dress and go with him" So Martha Climbed into the wagon and went to the House of the Lord and they were married. The day was 21 April 1857.

Two days after their marriage her husband started off with the handcart company, on the long journey across the plains and over the Ocean to England. He left his young bride in the care of his mother, at the Smoot home. She helped with household chores and happy to be with this large family.

The missionaries were called home early because of Johnson's army invading the valley. William and Martha stayed and worked for the Smoot family for two years.

William Jasper Harris Jr, the first child is a son of William Jasper and Martha Ann Smith Harris, born on August 4 1859 in Sugarhouse, Salt Lake City, Utah.

William Jr. lived in Salt Lake City until he was eleven years old, when the family moved to Provo, Utah. He missed the close association with his with his uncle Joseph's children for they were his close friends, as were all of his cousins that lived in Salt Lake.

His parents had 11 children, his brothers were his best life long friends. In a large family it is necessary for everyone to help. They worked together as they were growing up, planting the garden, weeding and watering. There was a cow to milked morning and evening. They had out grown the two room home and the boys learned how to build. How nice to have more rooms. This may have been the start of the boys going in the construction business. As the son's worked together strong bonds were formed. . They supported one another all their life.

William was 21 years old when he met and married, Jessie Lena Freckleton, in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City on 28 December 1882. Jessie was 17 years old and was born on 22 September 1865 in Desert, Utah. She was the daughter of John Orr and Jessie Gardner Freckleton. They would become parents of Fourteen children.

Their first child William Ray Harris was born 30 December 1883 in Provo, Utah. When Ray was eight years old, he became very ill and died. He death caused a void in the family. A great blessing came to them two days after the funeral, another son was born to William and Jessie, he was named, Wilford LeRoy Harris.

About three years after Ray's Death, William and his brothers leased a cattle ranch in Nevada. The ranch was situated twelve miles from the railroad mile and a half from the nearest neighbor. During the winters, Living on this ranch was lonesome for Jessie and the children. The men would always saddle up a horse and call on a neighbor but the women and their children were left at home.

They all looked forward to summer. Traveling was easier and there were fun times out on the ranch. Each rancher would have a gathering at his place once each summer. The invitations were passed around in relays. The rancher who was giving the party would ride to his nearest neighbor, that neighbor would ride and pass the word on, until everyone knew. There were no class distinction nor favoritism, the whole family was invited. Generally all came.

The roads were poor, not much better than cow trails so the time in starting depended on the distance that needed to be traveled. The mothers with small children rode in the wagon with the bedding and the food. The Host served

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a midnight supper that was really a banquet of all of the best food available. The meats and the vegetables were all from their own gardens and herds. Because they lived so far from the railroad and post office they received only about two shipments a year of flour, salt, sugar and other supplies

On arriving at the ranch where the party was being held, at sundown or about, each rancher would pick a spot to camp, serve their family an evening meal from their own picnic basket and then the visiting would begin. The children played together, the men pitched horseshoes, discussed cattle, horses and the range and the women talked of cooking, sewing and rearing of the children.

After everyone arrived the music would start, it was a special type of music, most playing by ear. (Everyone who had a instrument would bring it an join in playing for those who wanted to dance) There was singing, laughing and dancing, all would join in around a big campfire. After a midnight dinner was served, they would tuck their little ones in the wagon box to sleep, and would stay up most of the night dancing.

It is noted that there were many proposals of marriage, and many accepted at these summer parties.

It was here in Nevada that a little baby girl was born to Jessie and William and was named Emily. She didn't take a breath, it was a difficult birth and Jessie was ill for several weeks. William was deeply concerned over Jessie and telegraphed to Provo for a Doctor's advise and some medicine, which came by mail. Her sister Lizzie was there helping her and she followed the direction the doctor sent and Jessie was slowly improving.. She was in such pain, her breasts were caked with milk. Lizzie gave her some relief by drawing the milk out of Jessie's caked breasts and spitting it into a basin. Lizzie was happy when they found a little lamb to take on that job, and this greedy little fellow seemed delighted to oblige.

They passed through many hard times on the Ranch. They chose to move to move to Eureka. , Jessie was so happy, for they would be near her parents. This was a happy time for them to be with her family and old friends, spending evenings with family. They had a little daughter, Bessie, in Eureka. There was some medical care there, which was a blessing for William and Jessie. They stayed there until Bessie was ten years old.

Opportunity came to William and his brothers and they moved their families to Black Rock Beach on the edge of the Great Salt lake. They built the Giant Racer and the other rides at Saltair Resort. This was the largest, longest and favorite ride. It was like a extended vacation for the children to live on the beach. even is the lake was full of salt. They couldn't swim but they could float and not worry about sinking. Saltair was the place to go for the next fifty years, there was a open air cars on a train and the ride out to the resort was an experience it its self. There

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were rides to go one food available, Dancing in a beautiful hall with shing hard wood floors and some of the best orchestra's to dance by.

When this job was completed they moved to Salt Lake City. where there were so many opportunities for the children. They had dancing and music lessons, schools for them to attend .

Since the experience on the ranch William wanted to try farming. He had been in construction for many years and wanted a change. He purchased a farm in Benson Ward on Northern Utah, the soil was black and crops would so well there but the promised water wasn't developed.

He was happy to accept and offer that his brothers gave him. They wanted him to join them, they had a contract to build roads and bridges in Texas. They were going to leave their families at home and just the men go to Texas. They wanted William's, son John, to come with them. John told them he would come but he would take his family with him. They took the train and They felt they were on their way to make their fortune in Texas.

William purchased a home for is wife and family at 45 North 9West in Provo, and got his family moved in it before he left. The men worked hard and long hours. They stayed at camp all week and returned John and Ellen's home on Saturday and spent Sunday there.

The closest LDS church was a long drive, on narrow, bumpy roads. Some Sundays when they couldn't get to LDS meetings, they would attend services of another church. The members of these churches would challenge the children to repeat the Ten Commandants by memory and when they couldn't, they let them know they considered them heathens. The children would repeat the Articles of Faith, but the people didn't understand what they were. Their Father felt, if they couldn't get the family to the LDS Church, that it was important to be in a church, worshipping on Sunday.

This work in Texas, seemingly and economic godsend, proved to be a disaster. The Cashier at the Bank where the State deposited the funds for their projects were deposited, absconded with the money and they ended up with ten cents on the dollar. They returned home penniless and discouraged.

William returned home to his wife Jessie and family, happy that before he left they had purchased a home. He was happy to be with his family again. After his long absence, they were all rejoicing to have him home.

He only lived two years after he returned from Texas. He died at his home on August 23, 1926.

William Jasper Harris Jr, was proud of his heritage, he bore testimony of the truth of the Gospel, he taught his children about the First Vision, of the appearance of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. appearing to his Uncle Joseph Smith.. He told that his Grandfather Hryum Smith was martyred because he would not and could not deny the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

He experienced the Lords blessings in his life, when he called on a mission, going back over the pioneer trails with a handcart, then with courage to face this long journey across the Sea to England. Being a missionary, traveling without purse or script, coming home and marrying and raising and supporting a family.

He mourned when some of his children choose other paths than those they had been taught.. He expressed these feelings as he often wrote to his mother in letters.. We have copies of some of these letters, (the original Letters are prized by our cousin Reed Harris)

Much of this history, is from my sister LaVerne' history and from a history written by my Great Aunt Elizabeth (Lizzie) Freckleton Hassel, the sister of William's wife, Jessie Freckleton Harris.

The heritage that we share is a wonderful one of greatness. Let us each count our blessings each day, to have been one that was chosen to come forth at this time, with the Gospel Restored under the direction of our Heavenly Father and his son Jesus Christ.

I don't think any of us understand the magnitude of these blessing. And perhaps we never will in this life but we will when it is our turn to move on to another sphere.

We are a blessed people. Let us treasure our heritage and hold tight to the faith of our fathers.