

WILLIAM COFFIN RAWSON 1832-1891

William Coffin Rawson was born on 13 January 1832, in Randolph, Indiana. He was the son of Horace Strong Rawson and Elizabeth Coffin. One year before his birth, his parents joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The family was present during many of the major events in the history of the church. In 1832, shortly after William's birth, they moved to Jackson County, Missouri. They had peace there for a short time until they were driven out by the mobs. His father recorded: "They (the mob) then commenced their depredation by whipping some; tarring and feathering others; and un-roofing and tearing down houses in the night; driving women and children into the woods; destroying property; until we could stand it no longer-- therefore, we cried out in self-defense. Some skirmishes took place--some killed and some wounded on both sides. We kept the ground until they gathered their forces, three to one of us, and they were well armed while we were not. We met them on the temple lot and compromised just on their terms, which was to give up our arms and forthwith leave the county. I saw Lyman Wight, who was our Captain, deliver his sword to Lieutenant Governor Boggs exclaiming, 'Take my sword or my head, I do not care a damn which,' and we were ordered to set our guns down on the temple lot against the fence."

In the dead of winter in 1833, the family moved with several other families to Lafayette County. William was only two at the time. His older brother and sister were required to walk barefoot on the frozen ground, as they had no shoes for the trip. His mother was pregnant with twins. The babies (a boy and a girl) were born in March, but only the girl survived.

In the spring of 1834 they heeded the call of their leaders to gather in Clay County. Again they were persecuted, and soon moved to Caldwell County hoping to enjoy peace. Horace's account states: "But in 1838, the war commenced again. A jealousy arose to the degree that all western hell boiled over. Old Beelzebub [Satan] and old Boggs, his right hand man, also old George M. Hinckle, the old apostate, all equipped the hellish clan for to destroy their fellow man. They called out eight thousand men against Far West and Diamon. The noted Hinckle betrayed Joseph and Hyrum . . . into the hands of the enemy, and also the rest of us, all who stood in their path or served in some way. The next morning, General Donaphin (sic) of Liberty, Clay County, one of the court martial, arose and said, 'Gentlemen, this is a damned blood thirsty inquisition and I will have nothing to do with it.' Next morning he started back to Liberty with his regiment, which frustrated their calculations."

William's father had been taken prisoner and the family did not know if he would ever return alive. General Doniphan apparently saved his life and many others that day. During the course of this persecution, William's mother often had to hide him and the other children in cornfields. They spent the night of Haun's Mill Massacre, 30 October 1838, in a bear cave. The family often suffered from extreme cold and lack of food.

In the winter of 1837, when William was nearly six years old, they moved with the members of the church to Illinois, where they helped build the city of Nauvoo. Here they enjoyed peace for some time and feasted on the teachings of the servants of God, living some of the time in Lima (also known as Yelrome) and some of the time in Nauvoo. It was while the family lived in Nauvoo that William was baptized, on 9 August 1841.

In the fall of 1845, when William was thirteen years old, his family was driven out of Nauvoo. They left the state in the spring of 1846, and stopped in Council Bluffs, Iowa. At this time, his older brother, Daniel, went with the Mormon Battalion to help in the war with Mexico. The family stayed in Iowa for four years, migrating to Utah in 1850 in the Wilford Woodruff Company. They left Florence, Nebraska, on 21 June 1850, and arrived in Salt Lake City on 3 October 1850.

During the crossing of the plains, they saw many Indians and experienced occasional Indian raids. There was an incident when the ox teams got spooked and began running at lightning speed in all directions, smashing into other wagons, spilling women and children out. After the teams were stopped, everyone was astonished to find no one was killed and only one was badly wounded. There was little damage to the wagons although Brother Woodruff had to shoot his horse, as it had broken its leg. While on the trail, they experienced a violent thunderstorm that killed one man and three oxen. An outbreak of cholera took the lives of approximately sixteen people on the way. There were some good times on the trail, especially in the evenings and on Sundays when they often enjoyed music because there were two violins in camp. One time while fishing in a hole near Fort Bridger, they netted twenty-two trout in thirty minutes.

While on the trail, eighteen year-old William met Eliza Jane Cheney, who was a member of another company traveling to Utah at the same time. She was only thirteen years old and he did not give her much thought at the time. However, six years later William and Eliza were married in Farmington, Utah, on 12 October 1856, by Bishop John Hess, and later sealed in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City on 22 March 1862. William was described as being six feet tall, of slender build, and “with considerable breadth through his shoulders.” He had a receding hairline.

Soon after their marriage, they moved to Payson, Utah where their first two children were born, Eliza Jane (1857) and William Franklin (1858). In the fall of 1857, William was called to Echo Canyon to help hold Johnston’s Army back. He came home from this experience very sick with “rheumatics.”

In 1860, they moved to Ogden, Utah, in the area now known as 22nd Street and Adams Avenue. Olive Ann (1862), Zenia Vanetta (1866), Sara Emily (1869), Nathan Cheney (1872), and Elizabeth Rebecca (1873) were born to Eliza and William while living in Ogden.

William helped build the Ogden Tabernacle and the Ogden Canyon Road. He was a good carpenter and also worked for a number of years selling wagons and farm implements. He was very fond of books and writing, especially preferring old books and antiquarian subjects.

During the winter of 1874-75, William served a Genealogical Mission to the North Eastern States. He and his companion, Noah L. Shurtleff, were able to do a considerable amount of work on ancestry lines.

In the late fall of 1876 there was a small pox outbreak in Ogden. William moved his family from Ogden to the small town of Harrisville. He intended to move back to Ogden as soon as the situation there improved, but during this time he was chosen as the first counselor to Bishop Pleasant Green Taylor of the Harrisville LDS Ward, and they never moved back to Ogden. He held the position of counselor for thirteen and one-half years, until the ward was divided in 1890. At that time he was made councilor to Bishop William A. Taylor in the new Farr West LDS Ward, a position he held until his death. While living in Harrisville, William set up a small store and ran a farm. He was also a member of the school board, and secretary of the Western Irrigation Company.

In the 1880s, charges for cohabitation often put the brethren in the state penitentiary. Since the bishop was incarcerated, William took charge of many of the ward affairs. He also regularly visited the brethren who were in the prison.

William's son-in-law, William N. McEntire, was a road construction supervisor who took most of the material for building the Farr West road out of William Rawson's farm land.

William performed many priesthood ordinances including the infant blessing of his grandson, James Arthur McEntire. During the winter of 1890-91 his health began to fail. He passed away in Farr West, Utah, on 26 April 1891, at the age of fifty-nine. He is buried in the Ogden City Cemetery.

SOURCE:

Ancestral File. Family Group Sheets.

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McEntire, James Arthur. *Life Story of James Arthur McEntire*.

Morgan, Fern Roberts. *Histories of Child, Rawson, Coffin, And Holzclaw Families*. 1983.

Boggs, Lieutenant Governor	Rawson, Horace Strong
Cheney, Eliza Jane	Rawson, Nathan Cheney
Coffin, Elizabeth	Rawson, Olive Ann
General Donaphi	Rawson, Sarah Emily
Haun's Mill Massacre	Rawson, William Franklin
Hess, Bishop John	Rawson, Zenia Vanetta
Hinkle, George M.	Shurtliff, Noah L.
McEntire, William N.	Smith, Hyrum
Rawson, Daniel	Smith, Joseph
Rawson, Eliza Jane (daughter)	Taylor, Pleasant Green
Rawson, Eliza Jane Cheney	Taylor, William A.
Rawson, Elizabeth Coffin	Wight, Lyman
Rawson, Elizabeth Rebecca	Woodruff, Wilford