

Livingston, James Campbell - Account Book View

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Dry Goods And Groceries In Early Utah

An Account Book View of James Campbell Livingston

By Ronald G. Watt (2nd great Grandson)

The Scottish immigrant James Campbell Livingston was one of many unskilled laborers who arrived in Utah during the Territory's first decade. Like most immigrants of similar social standing, he kept few records about himself. Late in life Livingston wrote a short autobiography, but only part of this is extant. Despite this almost total lack of information about the man, it is possible to fill out the details of his daily life by turning to a type of record usually ignored by historians. Livingston was a quarryman for the Salt Lake Temple project. He was credited for his labors on the books of the public works office and drew his salary in produce and dry goods from the tithing store of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The notations in these financial records preserve a fascinating picture of the work habits and life-style of a typical immigrant family in the 1850s.

The circumstances that brought the twenty-year-old Livingston to the Mormon gathering place in 1853 centered around his conversion four years earlier and the disruption of his family ties. Livingston was born on December 2, 1833, at Shotts Iron Works in Lanarkshire, Scotland. When he was only five years old, his mother, Helen Connor, died, and ten years later both his stepmother and father, Archibald Livingston, succumbed to cholera. The children were given over the care of a grandmother, and James and his younger brother Charles worked to help support the family. Soon after this, in May 1849, he met the Mormon missionaries and was baptized by Elder Paul Gourlay. In May 1853 he sailed for America, leaving his brothers and sister in Scotland with their grandmother.

The ship Falcon sailed from Liverpool to New Orleans where the Mormon immigrants were transferred to river boats and taken to the overland outfitting station at Keokuk, Iowa. Before continuing his journey, Livingston visited across the river the abandoned Mormon city of Nauvoo, Illinois, where he met Emma Smith and her second husband, Maj. Lewis A. Bidamon. Livingston left Keokuk in July with the Appleton Harmon ox train and drove a team the entire distance to Utah.^[1]

Within a few days of his arrival in Salt Lake City, on October 16, 1853, Livingston started to work for Brigham Young. His task was building a road up City Creek Canyon so the church president could obtain lumber. The public works time books record that by October 28 he was working in Red Butte Canyon quarrying rock for the temple. His assignment to the job could have been quite by chance, or perhaps someone felt it was the best position available for his needs. Whatever the reason, it would remain his chief occupation until his death in 1909. The church needed quarrymen for the building of the temple. Livingston was young and had gained some skill in the coal mines in Scotland, but his determination and hard work would gain for him his livelihood.

Livingston missed very few days of work in the next two months. He diligently labored in the cold of November and most of December. Finally just a few days before Christmas the quarry closed because of the snow and the cold and remained unworked until February 19 when Livingston was again back on the job.^[2] For his labor he received \$2.00 a day which, in Utah's virtually cashless society, the clerks in the president's office credited in the ledger. Livingston drew on this credit at the tithing store, where he obtained the basic food items he needed. During the first five months of the year, he carried out 179 pounds of flour, just over a bushel of potatoes, 19 1/4 pounds of beef, 3 pounds of pork, 18 pounds of salt, and 4 pounds of butter. These goods were charged against his salary credits at tithing store prices: flour and potatoes at about 6 cents per pound, salt at 5 cents, beef at 8 cents and pork at 20 cents a pound, and eggs at 18 cents a dozen. He did not vary his purchases at the tithing store the remainder of the summer, although it is very probable he obtained early garden produce from his neighbor's yard and milk from a neighbor's cow, which he paid for either in labor or in the cash that he received infrequently. In October and November he obtained \$55.21 worth of food from the tithing

store. He purchased in those two months one dozen eggs, one chicken, 1/2 pig's head, 120 pounds of flour, 29 pounds of salt, 1 1/2 pounds of butter, 19 1/2 pounds of meat, 26 cabbages, 2 1/4 pounds of pork, 2 cauliflowers, 19 1/2 bushels of potatoes, 1 1/4 bushel of turnips, 2 bushels of carrots, 1 bushel of onions, and 12 squashes.

His purchases varied only a little through 1857 when the tithing store entries end. He made large purchases of molasses, bran, and commeal. He also obtained small quantities of peas, tomatoes, cherries, peaches, currants, and berries in season. Fruits and vegetables were delicacies. His main diet was composed of flour products and molasses, with a little meat. By this time Livingston was married. The family was not impoverished, but they managed to keep within a limited budget only by careful planning.^[3]

In 1855 he had purchased a lot and built a one-room adobe house on it. Undoubtedly, he had built the house for his marriage to Agnes Widdison which took place on June 7, 1854. Probably in anticipation of his marriage, he had purchased that spring a tub, a washboard, and a dipper. The day before his wedding he bought a broom, which lasted until February of the next year when he purchased another. The account books list a few other commodities. During the cold month of January 1854 he picked up a pair of mittens for \$ 1.50. In May he drew out a pair of shoes for \$4.00 and the material for trousers for \$6.00. In November he bought satin, flannel, factory cloth, ticking, prints, and batting, probably for a mattress.^[4]

Livingston's marriage made a noticeable impact on his dry goods buying. During the first six months of 1855 he purchased 14 yards of prints, 4 1/2 yards of blue prints, 3 yards of flannel, 1 yard of white flannel, 1 yard of linen, 6 yards of bleached muslin, 7 yards of blue drilling, and 2 spools of cotton. The records list a fine-toothed comb and coarse-toothed one. He probably obtained some of the cloth for the couple's first baby, Janet, who was born on March 21, 1855. The infant needed diapers and blankets, and the Livingstons probably needed bedding also.^[5]

According to the records, shoes consumed a significant part of his \$12.00-a-week income. In the fifteen months beginning with January 1855 he spent \$62.00 for shoes and shoe repairs. In January he purchased two pairs of shoes and repaired three pairs. In March he bought two pairs of shoes and repaired one pair. In August he purchased one pair and repaired his and his wife's shoes. In October he had two pairs repaired and purchased one pair. In December he bought shoes for his wife and had a heel replaced. In January 1856 he purchased a high-top pair of shoes and again replaced a heel. In March he had two of his shoes repaired and one pair of his wife's. It is interesting that repairs to his wife's shoes cost at the most 35 cents, while the bill for repairing his shoes ran as much as \$2.50. It cost him \$4.00 to \$5.50 for each of the seven pairs of shoes. All of this suggests that his work as a quarryman was hard on leather but also that the leather was poor and the manufacturing of shoes was done poorly. That his wife only bought one pair of shoes might mean that she went barefoot some of the time.^[6]

Livingston was responsible for buying his own tools. He purchased a pick from the blacksmith shop in August 1854, costing \$4.34, and in February he had it sharpened, which they called "dressing." In March 1856 the blacksmith shop made him another pick.^[7]

From the tithing store he also purchased matches and soap, and in 1857 he bought a coat and gloves. In January 1856 he bought some books, whose titles are not listed. Apparently he had learned to read and was interested in furthering his knowledge.^[8]

Livingston made a few purchases which would be considered unusual for a devout Mormon of later generations. Periodically he bought a little tobacco, reflecting the less stringent attitude of that day concerning the Word of Wisdom as a commandment. There were also small purchases of coffee and tea but only after his marriage. He also bought a very small amount of whisky. Whisky was used as a medicine, and the small quantity he obtained indicates that he probably used it for that purpose.

From the extant employment records one can piece together something about his work habits. Livingston was at the quarry working almost every day in the six-day week. His diligence probably brought him to the notice of his superintendent, fellow Scotsman John Sharp, who later made him foreman at the quarry with an increase in salary. Only one extended absence is recorded, a period of more than three weeks from October 18 into mid-November. The pattern of absences at the beginning

of this period suggests an illness. This supposition is supported by an entry in the tithing store books recording one of Livingston's infrequent purchases of whisky.^[9]

In Livingston's busy and difficult life he found time for some pleasure, most of it undoubtedly informal recreation. On June 9, 1855, he bought some theatre tickets, probably to commemorate his first year of marriage. Two years later he took Agnes to a play at the Social Hall. Life was difficult and formal amusement was infrequent, but the Livingstons still managed to find a little time for entertainment.

The account books reveal a few details about the obligations of citizenship. In the first place, Livingston became a citizen of the United States, and on March 14, 1854, paid \$1.00 for his naturalization papers. He also contributed to the betterment of his adopted government by paying territorial taxes of \$1.60 and city taxes of \$1.70 on August 31, 1856. The following year these assessments rose to \$5.10 for the territory and \$2.20 for the municipality. In 1857 he also paid the Eighteenth Ward schoolhouse tax of \$1.00.

Livingston had left his brothers and sister in Scotland. In June 1854 he paid two sums into the perpetual Emigrating Fund Company, one of \$50.75 and the second for \$50.00, so that his family, including his aunt, uncle and grandmother, could immigrate to Zion. During the next year James apparently continued to correspond with them, for he made several purchases for postage. On June 19 he sent his first letter, probably notifying the family that he had sent for them. He apparently mailed other letters on September 27 and November 13. He dispatched his last letter on June 16, 1855, which was probably sent to the outfitting area in the Midwest. His family arrived on September 12, and there must have been great rejoicing when they were once more reunited.

Just like any family, the Livingstons had a few large purchases. A month after his second child was born in 1858 he bought a cow for \$40.00. By this time he had two young children, and buying milk from a neighbor was becoming too expensive.^[10]

In 1860 the bookkeepers began a new system of record keeping. During the fifties they had kept several small volumes. Now the clerks began to make out disposable slips for orders, never designating in the permanent record the specific nature of the order. This makes it virtually impossible to follow Livingston's living patterns any further.

Except for his short life history and some genealogical information, little is known about James Livingston's life after 1860. He continued to work in the quarry, but when the quarry was temporarily closed he built railroads and freighted. He married two more women as plural wives and had a total of eighteen children. With the completion of the Salt Lake Temple he moved to Sanpete County where he died in 1909. Without the account books little would be known about him.

Endnotes

1. ↑ (1902) *"Short Extracts Taken from the Autobiography of James Campbell Livingston"*, typescript. Salt Lake City, UT: Mormon Biography Collection, Archives Division, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.
2. ↑ (1852-55) *Time Book A, Public Works Account Books*. Salt Lake City, UT: LDS Archives, Tithing Store.
3. ↑ (1855-57) *Tithing Store Account Books*. Salt Lake City, UT: LDS Archives.
4. ↑ *Trustee-in-Trust Ledger C*. Salt Lake City, UT: LDS Archives.
5. ↑ *Merchandising Books A*. Salt Lake City, UT: LDS Archives.
6. ↑ *Shoe Store Account Book A*. Salt Lake City, UT: LDS Archives.
7. ↑ *Blacksmith's Shop Account Book C*. Salt Lake City, UT: LDS Archives.
8. ↑ (1855-57) *Tithing Store Account Books*. Salt Lake City, UT: LDS Archives.
9. ↑ (1852-55) *Time Book A*. Salt Lake City, UT: LDS Archives.
10. ↑ (1853-59) *Trustee-in-Trust Ledgers*. Salt Lake City, UT: LDS Archives.

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