

THOMAS WIDDISON

By Marie Widdison Haws, a great granddaughter

Thomas Widdison was born in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England, 6 May 1806. As a young man he left his home in Sheffield and went to Scotland to work for Robert Russell, Jr., who was a file cutter. While working and learning the trade he fell in love with Janet Russell, the young daughter of Robert Russell and Agnes Adams. In 1827 when Janet was 15 years of age and Thomas was 21, they were married. During the years that followed two daughters and five sons were born to them: Agnes, Hannah, Henry, Robert Russell, William Livingston, John and James Gourley. Two of the sons, Henry and John, died in infancy.

In 1842 the family accepted the Gospel and Thomas, Janet and their oldest daughter, Agnes, were baptized. They, like others in similar circumstances, had a desire to come to America, and to "Zion." Their dream was finally realized in 1853. The official list of saints assisted to emigrate to Zion by the Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company, as prepared by the British Mission Office at Liverpool, England, contained the following names:

Thomas Widdison	Age 45
Janet Widdison	38
Agnes Widdison	21
Hannah Widdison	14
Robert Widdison	9
William Widdison	6
James Widdison	2 months

They sailed to America on the ship "Falcon" with A. T. Wade, ship captain. There were 324 saints on board under the direction of Elder Cornelius Bagnall. They left Liverpool on the 28th of March 1853. They went steerage, as many emigrants did, in the bottom of the ship. They took care of their own food and sleeping accommodations. The ocean was very rough and the voyage lasted almost eight weeks. Four children died during the trip but the general health of the company was good. They arrived in New Orleans May 18, 1853. From New Orleans Elder John Brown, the Church Emigration Agent at New Orleans, accompanied the saints up the Mississippi River. They landed

in St. Louis, Missouri on May 27, and re-embarked for Keokuk, Iowa, the same day. Here they stayed long enough to get fitted out with ox teams and wagons to cross the plains. Captain Appleton M. Harmon, who had just returned from a mission to England, was in charge of the company, which was made up of 22 wagons and 200 people. On July 14 Captain Harman was arrested by a constable for having a yoke of stolen oxen in his camp. His cattle were unbranded so he was unable to prove his innocence. He offered to pay but his offer was refused. He had to return to Kanesville, Iowa, where he was adjudged guilty, but not intentionally. This episode caused a two or three day delay in the company's travel. With the matter settled the company continued their journey, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley October 16, 1853, nearly seven months after their journey began.

Upon arriving in the Valley, the Widdison family lived for a while with John and Elizabeth Gray (Elizabeth was a sister to Janet). There they stayed until their log home was built on the lot assigned to them on 3rd North and 6th West. A few months after their arrival the oldest daughter, Agnes, married James Campbell Livingston.

The year 1856 was a hard year. Money was scarce. Food consisted mostly of weeds and roots. At harvest time Janet took her children into the wheat fields after the grain had been taken off. They gleaned the heads that had fallen to the ground. In the course of a day, by gathering a head or two at a time, they would get a sack full. This was threshed out with a flail. Then by holding it three or four feet above the ground and letting it fall onto a cloth, the chaff would be blown away. In this way they were able to obtain enough wheat to provide flour to last, if used sparingly, until the next harvest.

In Salt Lake Thomas followed his trade as a file cutter. His grandson, James G. Widdison, Jr., gives us the following description:

"As a small boy I used to play around the old shop

where Grandfather had continued his trade as file cutter. I never saw him at work, as he died before I was born, but I received some instruction as to the manner in which he handled the worn out files that were brought to him to be provided with a new set of teeth. For fear that file setting has become a lost art, I had better mention the method used. Tool steel, as well as all iron products, was too valuable in those days to be discarded, so the worn down files were placed in a forge and heated to a high degree and then buried in ashes and allowed to cool very slowly. In this process the temper was taken out of the steel. Then by means of chisels and punches of various sizes and shapes, new teeth were cut or stamped into the softened steel, after which it was reheated, and tempered by being quickly cooled through dipping in oil. In this manner anything from a saw file to a rasp was supplied with a new set of teeth and started on another period of usefulness."

An interesting article appeared in an October 1858 Deseret News, describing the Deseret State Fair held that year in the Social Hall. It applauded the "spirit of industry, comfort, and enterprize, which at the least prove that idleness forms no part of the faith of the people," in spite of the fact that they were isolated and so remote from the improvements of art, so abundant in the east. Among other things it said, "T. Widdison showed some good and neat files."

In 1862 Thomas and Janet's second daughter was also married to James Campbell Livingston. The Livingstons resided in the San Pete area.

Shortly after arriving in the valley, the two older sons, Robert and William, though only 8 and 10 years of age, were sent to West Jordan to live with and work for the Matthew Guant family. There they worked in the woolen mill during the day, and they did the chores in the evening. The work was hard and living conditions were miserable. At one time, when they were discouraged and homesick, they gave up the job and returned home, only to be sent back for two more years.

When the Guant family left the Church and went back east, the two boys went home, having learned many valuable lessons which helped prepare them for the future. Upon returning home they hired out to a freighting outfit to go to Nevada. When older, they took several trips to Nebraska for emigrants by ox team. These trips each took about five months, and many hardships were endured.

In 1869 Robert married Lois Savoni Thompson and they lived on the south half of the family lot in Salt Lake until 1889. They then moved to Park City, but returned to Salt Lake in 1897. They had ten children.

In 1872 William married Mary Alice Wilding. They also lived on 6th West in Salt Lake until they moved to Idaho. They had eleven children.

James, who was much younger than his brothers, and consequently didn't work with them, married Alice Pinney in 1878. They built a brick house on the corner of the family lot in southwest Salt Lake, where they lived until Feb. 1888. Four of their children were born here. They moved to Hooper where seven more children were born.

On May 15, 1876, Thomas Widdison died in Salt Lake City at the age of 70. The May 18, 1876, Deseret News carried this article:

"A Respected Veteran"

"This afternoon the funeral services of Father Thomas Widdison were conducted at the 19th Ward Meeting house. He became connected with the Church in an early day, in his native country, Scotland, and came to this city in 1853, since which time, until his demise, he resided in the 19th Ward. He was universally respected by numerous relations, friends, and acquaintances, for his kind, fatherly disposition and his unswerving integrity to the truth."

What a great tribute! He was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery, Plot I, Block 16, Lot 11.