EDWIN RUSHTON

BRIDGE BUILDER AND FAITHFUL PIONEER

By

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My earliest recollection of Father is a picture in my mind of him and us children gathered around a lighted lamp at home in the evening. He would read out loud to us regularly. His selections were not particularly appropriate for someone as young as I was then, nevertheless we were expected to stay quiet and listen. Mother was a plump wife and I was the youngest of her nine children, so that Father was pretty well along in years when I was born. He had a full beard, and to me seemed quite stern and austere. I used to wonder what he was like as a young man and so in an effort to learn as much as I could about his earlier life in Nauvoo and his English background, I have had to question many people and search through old papers and books belonging to various members of his family. His father (my grandfather) kept a journal during some of the most interesting years of his life, and from this journal I learn that the Rushton family came from the city of Leek, Staffordshire, England.

In the city of Leek there lived a silk manufacturer. This family consisted of Richard Rushton, his wife, Lettice Johnson Rushton, three sons and four daughters. This was a united, happy family and much of their leisure time was spent singing together. One day this father said to his youngest son Edwin (born June 1, 1824) (who is the subject of this sketch), "A new religious sect is holding a meeting tonight. I wish you would go and hear what they have to say." Edwin answered, "why don't you go yourself?"—Grandfather said, "Because, son, they are a very unpopular people and it might hurt my business." "Then why not send one of the older boys," Edwin continued, and grandfather came back with the answer, "I want you to go because I can depend on your judgment." Later during a report of this meeting, Father stated, "These men have the truth." The result was that this family joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1840. Father was the last to be baptized, saying, he wished to be sure of what he was doing.

Less than two years later, Grandfather and Grandmother, Father and one of his sisters and her husband set forth on the long journey to America; other members of the family had already gathered with the Saints in Nauvoo. They went by railroad to Liverpool. The fare to America was 10 lbs. (56.00) each, second class, and charges for all luggage over a hundred weight, per passenger. While in Liverpool Father, not yet 18 years of age, married a young Mormon girl, Mary Anne Powdar, the only one of her family who belonged to the Church. Thus the Rushton party was increased by one before embarking on the ocean voyage, the young couple making this their honeymoon trip. The group along with other Saints took passage for New Orleans on the sailing vessel "Hope of Duxbury". The ship sailed out of dock Friday, February 8, 1842. Nothing unusual is recorded in Grandfather's diary of this voyage. Two children of Saints died and were buried at sea and one baby was born. On March 19 the vessel entered the Florida stream. March 30 the steamboat "Star" reached her and took her in tow; also another sailing vessel, "The Osceola", which was a little ahead. Towing each in turn over the bar and both ships up the "Mississippi River, March 31", quoting from the diary Grandfather writes, "we came in sight of a most beautiful country diversified with plantations, farm houses, sugar manufacturers, beautiful cottages, and woods on each side of the river".

They reached New Orleans April 1, and immediately chartered a steamboat "The Louisiana" for St. Louis. Before leaving New Orleans, they were examined by the custom-house officials and obliged to enter all baggage and merchandise. Grandfather entered a quantity of silk twist, and as the
boat set out immediately, he had no time to redeem the goods. They arrived in St. Louis April 10, and here exchanged their English money for American money, getting a little more than $6.00 for an English sovereign. They continued on in the same boat, passed the beautiful city of Quincy, arriving at Nauvoo the evening of April 13, after being ferried across the river.

Father was naturally very anxious to find the members of his family already established there, and hurried towards the town in search of them. He had ridden only a short distance when he met a man riding a beautiful black horse. The man accosted him, saying, "Hey, Dub, is that a company of Mormons just landed?" In much surprise Father answered, "Yes, sir." "Are you a Mormon?" the stranger continued. "Yes, sir," Father again answered. "Do you know about old Joe Smith?" the mounted stranger asked. "I know that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God," said Father. "I purpose you are looking for an old man with a long, grey beard. What would you think if I told you I was Joseph Smith?" the man continued. "If you," said Father, "are Joseph Smith, I know you are a Prophet of God." In a gentle voice the man explained, "I am Joseph Smith. I came to meet those people, dressed as I am in rough clothes and speaking in this manner, to see if their faith is strong enough to stand the things they must meet. If not, they should turn back right now."

This was Father's introduction to the Prophet. Father then inquired of and was directed by the Prophet how to find his people. As he hurried along, a woman came out of a house and called to him. As he approached, she said, "Oh, excuse me, I thought you were my brother-in-law." Father replied, "And I thought you were my sister-in-law." They both laughed, and Father explained whom he was trying to find. The woman then sent her little girl, Sarah, to take him by a path through the woods to the place where his family lived. This was Sarah, years later in Salt Lake City, because Father's wife and my mother. Father was at once initiated into the hardships and trials of life in Nauvoo. His acquaintance with and admiration for the Prophet grew rapidly, and there developed an intimate friendship between them. Father spent many hours later in life recounting his conversations with this great man, and describing his physique and personality. The "Historical Record of the Church" mentions that the Rushon family often serenaded the Prophet.

In July 1845, while Father was resting in the middle of the day, he received a vision, or dream, from the Prophet's record, "I was caught away by the spirit and taken on a frequentated footpath across lots to a ravine near blocks south of Nauvoo Temple. As I stood in contemplation, the earth on the right side of me opened to the depth of about five feet, and I beheld a nest of treasure on top of which was a beautiful Sear Stone, clear as crystal, which I was told belonged to me. At the time I received the vision, I did not know anything about a Sear Stone and had never sought for a vision. This same vision was repeated to me three times about two weeks apart. With this vision ever in mind, the following day I proceeded to hunt for the Stone, taking three of my relatives with me. After digging for a short time, the Stone was thrown out with a shovelful of dirt. It is my firm conviction that this Stone is one of the Stones spoken of by John the Revelator (2-17)." (See History of the Sear Stone. This Stone is clear and beautiful. It is about the size of an egg and shaped somewhat like a kidney. It is treasured by the family and has been shown to hundreds of people.)
When Joseph Smith organized the Nauvoo Legion, Father was commissioned a lieutenant in that immortal regiment. After the martyrdom, Father was one of four who took part in the second burial of the Prophet to preserve the body from the hands of ruthless, designing men. Prior to this, Joseph Smith had prepared a burial vault for the Smith family, and when persecution became alarming he came to Father and requested him, in the event the Prophet was killed, to see that the remains of the Smith family were disinterred and put into this vault. This trust Father fulfilled. When Joseph Smith was leaving the Mansion House, on his way to Carthage for the last time, Father was standing near the gate when Joseph said to his wife, "Emma, can you train my sons to walk in their father's footsteps?" She answered, "Oh, Brother Joseph, you are coming back." Father says Joseph asked the same question three times and that Emma gave the same answer each time. The Prophet then rode away to Carthage and his death.

At the time of the great exodus from Nauvoo Brigham Young, before leaving the city, asked my Father if he would see that all the sick and poor got across the river. This, of course, made it necessary for Father to be one of the last to leave this ill-fated city. As evidence of this I quote an excerpt from the diary of Thomas Bullock, a pioneer of 1847, clerk to Brigham Young for many years, and a brother-in-law of my Father. He, too, was one of the last to leave the doomed city. He says, "By myself, wife, four children, my sister-in-law, Fanny, and my blind mother-in-law (these were my grandmother and aunt) occupying the same house, were all shaking with the arco, with only my brother-in-law, George Murie, to do anything for us. Our goods were loaded on two wagons waiting to be moved, but I was too ill to drive. About nine o'clock in the morning the captain of a band of about thirty members armed with guns, bayonets and swords ordered me to be brought out. My sister-in-law assisted me to the door. The captain ordered me, at the point of a sword, to be done in half an hour or he would kill us all. I sent for George and Edwin (my Father) to drive my wagon to the ferry."

During those trying times my Grandfather, Richard Ralston, had died in Nauvoo and Father took his wife and blind mother to St. Louis as he was not in a position to go west with the Saints at that time. As he was leaving Nauvoo, he had a feather bed tied on his back, and his wife, Mary Anna, who was with him, was carrying some personal belongings in an arco. One of the mob following them threatened to shoot Father, "thinking of the feather bed he was carrying," turned his back and said, "Shoot!" Evidently this display of courage owed the mobster, as they were allowed to proceed unmolested. He established a home in the vicinity of St. Louis, and here his mother lived away and he, amidst vicissitudes, made preparations to follow his leaders westward.

"We have not much data of his trip across the plains, except that he was in the John Brown Company and was captain of ten cream Englishmen who had never seen oxen or a yoke. It kept Father and his young wife busy showing them how to yoke up their oxen. They arrived in Salt Lake Valley September 23, 1851."

I was able to obtain very little information concerning his early years in Utah. I find that one of the first jobs Father had after arriving here was in the saw-mill at the Public Works. He and Isaac Turner carved by hand, with a large crosscut saw, the lumber for public buildings. This saw was around the farm during my recollection. He was road supervisor and
Poll Tax collector for Salt Lake County for many years. Also at one time with another man had the contract to drive the mail coach from Salt Lake City to Wanship. In 1857, in the Endowment House, Father married Sarah Robinson, my mother, as a plural wife. No, with others, had settled on a tract of land running along the east bank of the Jordan River. President Young requested Father to enter title to this tract as none of the others could qualify. Later the President asked him to return the land to the original owners, which Father did. This left him a forty acre farm, part of which was in a pretty bend of the river. Here he built a rather commodious log house where myself and most of my older brothers and sisters were born.

This home was located between what is now 7th and 8th South and west of 9th West street, about where the 26th Ward Chapel stands. In 1865 Father married Maria Allen, affectionately called by all of us "Aunt Maria". This made his third wife.

Then the silk industry was being agitated here, President Young asked Father to sell mulberry trees up through the northern counties, and at about this time a grove of these trees was planted on the farm. Among these friendly trees and in the willows along the river bank, my sisters and I spent a happy childhood, and whenever I see mulberry trees or sweet clover, to this day I am seized with nostalgia. Father built swings and teetors and a sturdy whirligig for the enjoyment of our children. The popularity of this crude playground, one of the first in Salt Lake I believe, spread and families and whole groups came to enjoy it. In the river Father constructed two great waterwheels. These wheels had some eight wings or paddles with a wooden bucket or trough fastened to each paddle. As the force of the water turned this wheel, these buckets filled and as they went down again, emptied the water on the land for irrigation. This also carried water to a cistern to be used for culinary purposes. Years later, splendid artesian wells were found on this land, and what a thrill for all of us when that clear beautiful water poured from the pipes.

During the 70's and early 80's, Father was engaged in the contracting business. He equipped himself with machinery for driving piles and constructing bridges, becoming the builder of many of the early day bridges. He used to take large crews of men out on these projects, and was considered a generous employer. Many of these men affectionately called him "Boss" ever after. Some of these contracts were the Union Pacific Railroad bridges over the Bear and Snake Rivers when the railroad was rerouted. He drove the piles for bridges in Rush Valley, and for the D and R G Railroad from here to Green River. Father built the Jordan River Bridge west of Lehi, which is still in use. (The pioneer engineer, Cox, collaborated with Father in this bridge, and it was considered at that time quite an engineering feat.) He drove the piles for one of the old resorts on the Lake, and for six railroad bridges on the San Pete Valley branch line constructed under Simon Bamberger.

During the period when the Federal Government, through the United States Marshall and his host of deputies, was persecuting the leaders and members of the Church who were practicing Polygamy, Father was subjected to considerable humiliation because, having at the time three wives, he was being constantly watched and investigated by these lascivious minions of the law. The Federal Government expected and demanded that the brethren who were practicing polygamy renounce and abandon their plural wives.
and children, or suffer the consequences, the consequences being a term in the State penitentiary. Naturally, Father had no intention of forsaking either his wives or children, and eventually the deputy marshals obtained the evidence they had been seeking, and he was brought before the court for a hearing. In order to save his family the pain and embarrassment of a trial, he pled guilty and was sentenced to serve four months in the State prison. Many of the brethren received much longer terms, but because of Father's age, the court shortened his sentence. He served his sentence in the year 1887. I shall never forget as long as I live the day that my sister took me to visit Father in prison. Although I was only ten years old, the horribleness of all those fine men huddled together under those unsanitary conditions, with very little room to move around, is indelibly printed on my mind.

During all this time Father was an active, energetic Church worker, holding many responsible positions. Especially was he a forceful, intelligent extender, teacher and defender of the L.D.S. doctrine. The most potent force in the life of Father was his conviction of the divine mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He never tired of extolling the virtues of this great leader. It was said of Father that he never left the pulpit without mentioning his acquaintance with Joseph Smith, and the fact that Joseph was a Prophet of God. Father bore testimony to us children that he was in the meeting when the mantle of Joseph descended on Brigham Young, and that it was a tense, dramatic experience. It was following the meeting when this momentous event occurred, according to Father, that he and his wife called at the home of Emma Smith, entreating her, after such a miraculous testimony of the divine leadership of Brigham Young, to join the Saints in the western migration.

During the big real estate boom when I was about thirteen, Father sold his farms and built Father a new home on his city property in the old Sixth Ward, where he lived the remainder of his life.

Recently during Father's life he spoke of a Revelation given to the Prophet, Joseph Smith, in the presence of him and Theodore Turley at the Prophet's home, May 6, 1848. This Revelation is known as the "White Horse Prophecy." Some years before Father passed away, two prominent Church officials questioned Father at great length concerning this Prophecy, and recorded the statement he made at that time.

Father was well schooled in England, a critical reader of everything available, and a splendid correspondent. He was spiritual and generous, independent, honest and frank to the extreme, an enthusiastic citizen and a patron of civic affairs and the drama, often taking all his daughters to the old Salt Lake Theatre. One of the things said at his funeral was that he was a man of decided views and opinions, and the courage to fight for those convictions. He died December 29, 1904, when eighty years of age. Surviving him were three wives and thirteen children.