

# William and Sarah Wilkins Holyoak

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William Holyoak, son of George and Sarah Green Holyoak, was born April 12, 1825, at Yardley Wood, England – A suburb of Birmingham. Their home was called “Rose Cottage” as climbing roses almost covered the house. Other beautiful flowers and grass, which was green most of the year, filled the yard. From this childhood home, William acquired his love for beautiful flowers, shrubs, and trees. His people were farmers, so his early years were spent on the farm. At the age of eleven, he was bound out to learn the butchers trade (this was in the early reign of Queen Victoria). However, the butchers trade did not appeal to him, so at the age of thirteen he was bound out again – this time to his uncle John Green, to learn the harness trade. He remained until he was twenty-one years of age, when he married Martha Green (no relation to his mother). This marriage took place in the Church of England on the outskirts of Birmingham in May 1846.

William and Martha owned and operated a green-grocery store in Birmingham. Martha tended the store while William worked in the harness shop of manufacturing company. When Martha’s health failed they went to his parents’ home where their son Nehemiah was born on November 25, 1848. Three days later dear wife Martha died.

William sold the store and leaving his little son in the care of his parents, went to Leamington to work and there became master of two more useful trades – tanning leather and plastering. He had joined the Mormon Church in 1846, while in Leamington he was called to assist the L.D.S. traveling missionaries. His duty was to arrange for meeting places and advertise the meetings. While laboring in this capacity he received a strong testimony to the divinity of the church and the ability of Heavenly Father to aid his people in time of need. One time he had arranged for a meeting and the elders were delayed, so the responsibility of conducting the services fell on William’s shoulders. He had had no previous experience of this kind and felt very humble, praying for divine help to speak the right words. His prayer was answered and after the meeting a number of people shook his hand, saying that he had made clear to them the meaning of the Gospel.

William met Sarah Wilkins while laboring in this capacity. Sarah was a convert to the church and had gone to Leamington to live because of the hostility of her parents towards the new faith she had embraced.

Sarah Wilkins, daughter of Nathaniel and Alice Plant Wilkins, was born April 24, 1828, at Priors Hardwick, Warwick, England. She was baptized in March 1847, having been converted to the L.D.S. religion by her friends Ann and Harriet Drayson. She joined the Warwick branch. Her parents were both dark complexioned and her father’s hair was curly. The grandfather, Robert Wilkins lived with them. Their home was a two story house of four rooms – the two lower rooms had a dirt floor in one room and brick floor in the other.

The family consisted of four girls and two boys, but after Sarah’s conversion to the church she was forced to leave home because of the bitterness of her parents. She had already been earning her own living since the age of nine when she was bound out to work for a lady who did home laundering. She ironed all day – six days a week and having such a heavy head of hair only had a chance to comb it on Sundays. She became very proficient at her work, being able to make stiff bosomed shirts shine like mirrors.

Sarah met William Holyoak in Leamington at the branch meetings. A romance sprang up between them and when they decided to get married William visited Sarah's parents and asked her father's permission to marry Sarah. This request was flatly refused. William was unabashed however, and told them their plans were all made to marry and sail for America. He invited them to the church to see them married. The wedding took place on 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1849, in the Protestant Church of Birmingham, both having been members of that church.

Sarah's father did relent a little and he and one of the sisters came to see them married (that was the last time Sarah saw any of her family, nor did they even write to her). The bride was dressed in a blue wool cashmere dress with a white silk shawl and straw bonnet.

From the church they went to William's parents home where they were made welcome and where they remained until January 3, 1850, when they went to Liverpool. They sailed from Liverpool January 10, 1850, on the ship, Argo. Jeter Clinton was president of the company. This was the 46<sup>th</sup> company of saints to leave England.

There were at sea two months. The lives of all on board were miraculously saved from being shipwrecked off the coast of Florida. A terrific storm came up and the captain lost his direction but knew they were in the vicinity of a dangerous reef. He knew too, the faith of the Mormon people in prayer, as he had brought many companies of them to America. In his great anxiety he asked the saints to hold a prayer meeting, petitioning the Lord for guidance. This they did and immediately a great flash of lightening lit up the ocean (in the history of this in the Church Office it is mentioned as a heavenly light), enabling the captain to get his bearings and thus avoid disaster. They arrived safely in New Orleans Harbor, March 9, 1850. All went ashore onto the blessed land of America. William had twenty five cents in his pocket, so leaving his bride on the wharf he went in search of employment. He soon returned, however, and they were able to seek lodgings. As soon as he earned enough money they continued their journey up the Mississippi River to St. Joseph, Missouri. Here they remained two years. Two children were born to them here, but both died in infancy. Their names were Mary Ann and George Washington. In the year 1853 they went on to Fillmore, Missouri, remaining there for three years. Meanwhile two more children had been born to them – Jane Elizabeth and William Edgar. While living here Sarah was stricken with a sever illness and was given strong medicine, including much quinine. Both sickness and medicine resulted in the loss of her hearing. This was a great handicap throughout her life, but did not discourage her from leading a full and busy life.

In the spring of 1856, having accumulated enough money and a good outfit, they were ready to join a company of saints and begin the long journey to the Salt Lake Valley. They had a good wagon and two yoke of oxen, one of them a cow that furnished them with milk and butter all the way. William had made his own harness. In their wagon were a number of household goods which they had acquired in Missouri and had planned to use in their new home in Utah. The furniture included chairs and a special little one for Jane.

Several times during the journey, the captain of the company told William he was loaded too heavily and should discard some of their cherished possessions. William, being one to obey, did so. The captain's returned under the cover of darkness and appropriated them himself. Then William's oxen had to be used to pull the captain's heavy load through the bad places (later in Utah, Sarah recognized their property in the captain's home, but did not claim it).

The little family enjoyed good health on their journey. When they were nearing a stream Sarah would undress the babies and William would run with one under each arm and dip

them in the stream. Sarah was so afraid the Indians would get her babies so she sat under the cover all the way. While traveling through Wyoming they came to a great bed of saleratus. William gathered up a seamless sack full and when they reached Salt Lake he traded it for necessities.

They arrived in Salt Lake early in October then went to Parowan where William's father's family (with William's son Nehemiah, now eight years old) had located.

While William and Sarah were living in St. Joseph, Missouri, his father's family emigrated to America and journeyed to ?????? in the summer of 1854. William's mother and sister, Ann, were left buried on the plains of Nebraska. George Holyoak, William's father, was called by Brigham Young to help colonize the valley of the Little Salt Lake, later known as Parowan.

On arrival in Parowan, William and Sarah purchased a two room adobe house from Richard Benson. This was a well built house with thick walls. It was originally an Indian guard house and was just east of the west boundary of the adobe for wall which was built around the city for protection against the Indians. This was always their home. As time went on they remodeled and added to this house and made of it a comfortable and happy home for their growing family. Seven more children were born to them within its walls.

Sarah learned to perform all the tasks of a pioneer woman – Tasks such as to cord, spin, and weave wool into cloth for her family, carpets for her floors, and many other things. She was a splendid cook and housekeeper and a kind and devoted mother.

As she and William had to start working so young they had had no chance for schooling, but the knowledge they gained in England proved very useful and in the school of experience they had a long and thorough training.

William's training filled a very necessary link in the chain of home industry. He owned and operated a tannery, where he produced a fine grade of leather, which was used in his own shop and shops of others where shoes were made. In his own shop he made harnesses and saddles. His harnesses always took first place in the Utah State Fairs whenever entered, and his leather goods were sold in many parts of Utah, Nevada, and Arizona. He also owned a store and farm but worked in his shop most of the time.

The grounds around his home were always beautiful and well kept. Spacious lawns, flowers, ornamental trees, and shrubs made their yard a pleasure to themselves and a joy to all who saw it. William also had a great deal of civic pride and was of a generous nature. Giving freely of his time and means for the public good. He held many responsible positions in the community and was always planning for the betterment of the town. He served as city councilman from 1878 to 1880. As mayor from 1883 to 1886 and again in 1894 and 1895. It was during his last term as mayor that he planned a city park, consisting of ½ block of ground just north of the public schools. It was planted to grass and trees – the trees being spaced wide enough to allow for plenty of room for walking, playing, or any kind of amusement for the public. The trees ordered were delayed in shipment so arrived late one Saturday afternoon. Fearing that they would die if not planted immediately, William took his hired man, David Matheson, paid him out of his own pocket, arranged for a water turn on the park, and early Sunday morning found William and David planting trees. It was the only time William deliberately broke the Sabbath but he did it for the enjoyment of the public. In later years that park was turned over to the schools for a safe playground. In appreciation of his thoughtfulness and generosity, the schools closed on the day of his funeral so that the students and teachers could attend in a body to pay him honor.

William and John Brown, Sr., were the first men in Parowan Valley to put down pipe for an artesian well and from his endeavor the farming industry grew on a larger scale.

William's church activities were also many and varied. He was often seen working on the building that was to be the rock church house. The plaster of paris cornice around the balcony was the work of his hands. He planted the southwest corner of the church yard trees and grass and watered and tended it himself for some time. He was always active in church affairs and held many responsible positions in both ward and stake, serving for many years as a member of the stake high council until he became too old to carry the responsibility.

On November 8, 1885, their beloved daughter, Jane, passed away leaving three small children – the youngest a baby girl, four months old. Shortly after her mother's death, this baby became very ill making it hard for the grief stricken father to care for her. She was carried in her cradle to the home of her grandparents. William and Sarah loved and cared for her as their own child. Friends and relatives were always welcome in their home and Sarah enjoyed having them eat at her table. They both enjoyed entertaining, especially brother Thomas Durham and his choir, having them sing their favorite hymns. They especially liked "Hard Times Come Again No More." William was instrumental in having this choir go to Salt Lake City to sing for General Sherman at the time of his visit to Utah. The choir's most impressive number was 'Hard Times Come Again No More.' General Sherman stepped out on the balcony of the hotel to hear them and after hearing that song told them that he would never be instrumental in bringing hard times to the Mormon people.

Both William and Sarah were devout Latter-Day Saints, always living Christ-like lives, doing good to all they came in contact with. Their home was a peaceful happy one and when sorrows came to darken their door their faith and assurance of resurrection buoyed them up so they carried on.

Seven of their eleven children preceded them in death.

With the realization that his life's work had been full and complete, William's existence came to a close March 28, 1914. Out of respect for the aged pioneer and citizen all business houses closed on the day of his funeral – March 31<sup>st</sup>. It was the largest funeral service held in Parowan up to that time. Throughout his life in his dealings with his fellowmen, he was always honest, upright, treating all alike – irrespective of color, race, or creed. His character was typical of the hard-working, progressive, patriotic pioneer to which later generations are deeply indebted.

Sarah lived on several years after William's passing. Her later years were spent in darkness as she was almost totally blind. She passed away on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, 1919 at the age of ninety-one. The funeral service was held April 4<sup>th</sup>, and the speakers all bore strong testimony to the sterling qualities of Sarah W. Holyoak.