

ELIAS HARMER AND CHARLOTTE R. CLOWARD

Taken from the "A HISTORY OF THE HARMER FAMILY"
by John L. Harmer

Elias Harmer was born on November 25, 1811 to Joseph and Sara Heaton Harmer, in Chester County, Pennsylvania. Almost no information is available about his earlier years, not even the exact location of his home. He married Maria McMennemy about 1836. They were Quakers and so it is not known how they heard of the Gospel since Quakers are forbidden to listen to preachers of other faiths. They did have friends, Brother William Mendenhall, with whom they subsequently journeyed to Nauvoo arriving May 30, 1842, and with whom Elias formed a close friendship for the remainder of his life.

In the "History of the Church", by Joseph Smith, part 1 volume 5, there is recorded on page 21 the following account, under the date of Friday June 3, 1843.

"In the forenoon I rode out in the city, and sold to Brother Harmer lot 1 in block 123...."

Thus we see that Elias purchased from Joseph Smith, acting probably as the representative of the City of Nauvoo, which owned the land, a lot of ground upon which to build his home. While in Nauvoo he worked as a wheel-wright. Elias developed some what of a personal relationship with the prophet.

In the "Journal History of the Church", Monday, April 10, 1843, it is recorded that on Sunday, April 9, 1843, Elias Harmer was called to go to Chenango City, New York, to labor there as a missionary for an indefinite period. These missions fulfilled in this part of the Church's history often took the form of brethren being sent to a specific place to give the message of the restoration, organize and teach the converts, and prepare them if possible to come back to the city of Nauvoo. When the missionary felt that his work was done he simply returned to his home and took up his labor once again. He returned to Nauvoo in the fall of 1843.

In December of 1843, Maria Harmer passed away during child-birth, the child being stillborn. Persecution against the saints was increasing at that time and in June of 1844 the Prophet and his brother Hyrum were martyred. Then in September and October both of his sons, the youngest being three years old and the other five years old, died of some respiratory disease, probably diphtheria. Thus Elias Harmer found himself in Nauvoo two and a half years after his arrival, having lost his wife and two sons, the prophet, and the promise of the city beautiful and its peace and security now gone. Many would have lost faith with so many trials in such a short time.

In the fall of 1845 Elias Harmer married Charlotte Cloward who was also from Chester County, Pennsylvania. We don't know if they had known each other there or not. Elias and Charlotte did not remain long in Nauvoo, for his trade and talents as a wheel wright were needed further west where preparations would be made for the exodus of the saints to the Rocky Mountains. In 1846 they moved to Garden Grove with hopes of going on with the saints, but they were asked by the authorities to remain and make wagons and wheels for the saints. Often he and a companion named John Hamilton would work by lamp light late into the night. Family tradition tell us that Elias's own wagon was taken by one of the general authorities that reached the valley in the original group of pioneers in 1847.

After serving for five years at Garden Grove and feeling that their mission had been fulfilled, Elias, Charlotte and two small sons, Albert and Joseph, decided to come west with Charlotte's parents in July of 1851. At one time during the crossing the axle tree on the wagon of Jacob Cloward broke. The company captain felt that it would not be wise nor possible for the whole company to stop, so he continued the journey while Elias and Charlotte remained behind with their wagon to help repair Jacob Cloward's wagon. During the night, as the two men continued to work, wolves surrounded the wagons and brought fear into the heart of Charlotte lest her two sons become an evening meal for the beasts. The men frightened them off, however, and then soon finished their work and proceeded on to join the rest of the company.

Upon arriving in the valley, they discovered that their old friends the Mendenhalls had already settled in Springville and wanted them to join the settlement there. They settled there and were blessed with three more children, Eliza Jane, Loren Hannibal and William. William died by choking to death on a kernel of popcorn. There wasn't a lot of need for a wheel wright and so he returned to farming as an occupation. Elias had received a small quantity of sugar cane seed from a Mr. Mousley of Salt Lake, and with this seed he was able to grow some sugar cane on the corner of his lot in Springville. With this cane he made candy for his children, saving the seed for his fellow farmers that they too might grow some. He also made a sweet syrup out of parsnips. This would be done by boiling down the parsnips and then slowly cooling it into a thick syrup from which he made the candy. For years to come his children remembered and would seek to re-create their father's "sweet parsnip preserves."

The early years in Springville were not without their problems, among which were the Indian uprisings that took place from time to time. At first Elias would instruct Charlotte to take the children to the home of Bishop Johnson if ever trouble would develop. This proved to be so much trouble, and so difficult to do safely, that finally she prevailed upon Elias to make some heavy shutters for their own home so that she and the children could remain there. This decision seems to have been aided by the fact that one night while she was taking the children to Bishop Johnson's, a fierce thunderstorm struck, and in an effort to avoid the rain she and the children remained all night in the old schoolhouse. One night of that convinced her that all this had to stop, and from then on when the Indians came she remained at home.

Elias had always maintained friendly relations with the Indians, and went to some trouble to be kind to them and not offend them in any way. Chief Highforehead and his children were life-long friends of the Harmer family, and Elias always tried to allow the Indians the privilege of using his barn when they needed to put up their horses or their families for the night. All during his life he found it wiser and far better to give kindness rather than threats, and at the end of his life both white and red-man mourned his passing. Whenever he was needed he could easily be found, ready and willing to help without thought of reward or pay. No one will ever know the number of saints who left Garden Grove for the west indebted to him for a good wagon, or repaired and strengthened wheels, with no payment left behind but their gratitude and promise that they hoped one day to pay him back. One of the choice examples of his life and attitude is found when he was made the distributor of the Bishop's supply of flour to the needy and the poor. At one time the flour which was provided by the Bishop to be given to those in need ran out, and when a widow came for some flour, Eliza Jane went to her father and asked what to do. "Give her some from our own supply," he said, "and keep doing so for the others as long as any remains." Their supply did remain, and no one knew that for many people it was his own personal supply of flour that filled

their sack. Thus he lived. In life he found only one desire, to be a worthy holder of the priesthood he was given, and to be of some service to his fellow man.

In 1870 Charlotte Cloward Harmer passed away. Her health and strength had never been strong since the days of leaving Nauvoo, and at the Missouri River she had contracted a disease which had resulted in the hardening of her joints. She had not complained, but as her health and life faded she had come to rely more and more upon her daughter, Eliza Jane, to take care of the family needs. During her years of pain she was able to become more cheerful and optimistic as she learned the happy secret of giving happiness to those who had come to cheer her. She died on May 22, 1870 at the age of 52.

On July 24, 1878, at the age of 66, Elias Harmer passed away. He was probably just worn out, for he had spent the majority of his life in hard physical labor. It is not necessary to eulogize him further, his life and the events thereof speak much more dramatically than any written word of the type of character he possessed. The act of leaving his home for Nauvoo, the loss of his wife and children there, the struggle along the way, the willingness to wait and make the way for others to go ahead of him to the valley, the life of service and supplication of others, the willingness with which he consecrated all his possessions to the Lord in February of 1857, all speak more eloquently than a book of flowery sermon to the nobility and greatness of this man.

In a patriarchal blessing given to Elias by Hyrum Smith in March of 1843, Elias was promised that his children would keep his name in honor and perpetuate his memory to the latest generation. How much more fitting, and personally satisfying to him, to know that those of his descendants who really have kept his name in honor and perpetuated his memory have done so by remaining true to the message for which he gave himself so willingly and so thoroughly, the restored gospel of Christ.

Summarized on January 25, 1995, by Judith M. Robertson