

History of George Atkin

The following history was extracted from a brief history of George Atkin written by his daughter Rebecca Atkin Ostler. It was presented at a meeting of the Barbara Bowen Camp of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers on 18 May 1934.

George Atkin was born 12 Mar 1836 in Louth, Lincolnshire, England to Thomas Atkin and Mary Morley. Tom and Mary belonged to the Methodist Church and were sincere and devout in that religion. Tom and Mary had six children. Three of whom died in infancy. George had a brother, Thomas, Jr. and a sister Emily, both older than he.

In 1843, Tom and his wife Mary became acquainted with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and joined that church. At the time, George was only seven years old so his baptism had to wait until he became of age. This occurred on 13 Sep 1846..

Through personal industry and the practice of economy, Thomas, Sr. and his wife had made a good living. They invested a portion of their wealth in a block of land. On this property, they built three large commodious houses. They lived in one of them and rented the other two. They surrounded these homes with neat flower gardens, shrubbery, fruit and vegetable gardens. They lived on the rental income and the produce from the gardens and put all of Toms wages away for a rainy day. When they decided to emigrate to Utah, there was not a ready market for their houses. They sold their furniture and other items that they could not take with them and turned the houses over to Tom's brother John to dispose of them as soon as he could. The proceeds were to be forwarded when the homes were sold.

Thomas, Sr. And his family left Louth, England on 16 Jan 1849 and journeyed to Liverpool so that they would be on hand and ready to leave when the next company of saints were ready to embark. They sailed from Liverpool on the ship 'Zetland' on 29 January 1849. The Zetland was the largest ship that operated out of the Liverpool port. It was capable of speeds up to 12 knots per hour.

The Atkins were a part of a large company of saints presided over by Orson Spencer. The journey began with joyful singing of the songs of Zion. Within a few hours, their spirits were dampened as seasickness swept through the company. The journey was long, tedious and fraught with many perils. As they approached the American continent, they sailed through the West Indies and along the shores of Jamaica. They got their first glimpse of America on the first of April. There was great rejoicing and many happy hearts as they reached the promised land.

On the 28th of May, the company started Westward from Council Bluffs. Orson Spencer was still in charge. On the journey, the company was divided into two groups of fifty. William Hyde was captain of the fifty in which the Atkins traveled. A brother Collett was captain of their group of ten. Thomas had purchased two secondhand wagons, five yoke of oxen and two yoke of cows as well as cooking utensils and enough provisions to last till they could reap a harvest in Salt Lake Valley. The first days travel was rough. It was rough not only because they were in

hilly country and the roads were rough but the wagons were heavily loaded and the oxen were untrained as were their drivers. It was also required that one of the wagons be handled as gently as possible because Mary lay in that wagon sick with the cholera. Fortunately, the next day, Mary was much improved and eventually recovered fully from the illness.

On the journey they had many interesting experiences as they encountered Indians, buffalo and mosquitos. They also had many rivers to ford. They arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on the 25th of September 1849. Tom bought a corner lot in the 11th Ward and in the spring planted a garden of early vegetables. Produce from the garden and the scanty supply of their remaining flour made it possible for them to subsist until the fall harvest.

In the fall of 1850, Tom and his family were called to settle in the Tooele Valley. They were in the company of Benjamin Clegg, George W. Bryan, Thomas Lee, Peter Maughn and Jacob Hamblin.

Thomas Atkin, Sr. was a carpenter by trade. Using his skills, he did much to improve Tooele. He built homes, improved property and did many things to help the poor. George was 14 ½ years old when he arrived in Tooele Valley.

George developed a very pleasing personality and was always jovial and cheerful. His spirit would not let him look on the dark side of things and when troubles came his way no one else was unduly affected. He wielded a great influence for good among the young people of his time. He was loved by all who knew him. George was active in church, civic, social and business affairs. George had received some education in the schools he had attended in England. He was devoted to his religion and never left his home without attending to family prayer.

On 20 May 1856 George married Sarah Matilda Utley. To the union the following nine children were born: George, Jr. (1885); Mary E. (1860); Emily (1862); John (1864); Alice (1866); Thomas H. (1870); William T. (1872); and Mildred (1878).

On the 22 Nov 1883, George took a second wife. She was Emma Johnson, daughter of Andrew John Johnson and Elna Petronella Pehrson. At the time of this marriage, George was 47 years old and Emma was 20.

In 1857 when President Brigham Young received word that United States troops were on the way to exterminate the 'rebellious' Mormons, he immediately called out the militia and sent them to Echo Canyon to defend the saints. All available men from the various settlements were called out and organized for this defense. George Atkin was chosen as a captain of one of the companies. Prior to this service in the militia, George had been a teacher in Sunday School. In these classes they not only taught the Gospel but also taught the fundamental principles of education. On his return from Echo Canyon, George was called as a councilor to Eli Lee Superintendent in the Sunday School.

In Feb 1864, The Tooele Library was organized and a constitution and by-laws were adopted. George Atkin was chosen as one of the first directors of the Library. George was also a member

of the first Martial Band in which he played the fife. He also played an accordion in the first string band. George also belonged to an early drama club where he used his talent for acting to entertain the people.

In 1869, when the Union Pacific Railroad was being built from Ogden to Salt Lake City, George contracted to haul logs from Pine and Dry Canyons. Using his two teams of mules, he hauled the logs to the Great Salt Lake where Thomas Lee had the contract to turn the logs into railroad ties. The ties were formed into rafts which were then poled across the lake to Farmington.

It was also in 1869 that the ward meeting house was completed and dedicated. George Atkin and Edwin Broad were the building committee, George acted in the capacity of architect and business manager. Edwin Broad was the construction foreman. This building, constructed entirely of rock, had inside dimensions of 56 feet long, 36 feet wide and 21 feet high. The building, with later add-ons, was used until the South Ward was divided and became the First and Fourth Wards. The building was finally demolished in 1968 and the property on which it stood became the city park that in 2004 exists on the Southwest Corner of Main Street and Vine.

Early in April 1870, word had been received that visitors from Salt Lake City would be arriving in Tooele to dedicate the new chapel. On Friday 29 Apr 1870, about one PM, President Daniel H. Wells, councilor to President Brigham Young, and company arrived at Black Rock. The contingent included John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Joseph F. Smith and others. President Wells was formerly General of the Nauvoo legion and had been responsible for assembling the militia to keep Johnson's army from entering the Salt Lake Valley. The contingent was met at Black Rock by Captain George Atkin from Tooele and Captain Samuel A. Woolley from Grantsville. They escorted the contingent of visitors from Salt Lake City to a new carding and spinning factory in E. T. City. Here they were given a sumptuous meal and then were shown a demonstration of the factories spinning capacity. A meeting was then held in which the factory and surrounding area were dedicated. then the contingent continued on to Tooele. The contingent grew as they were joined by a large number of citizens in carriages, wagons and on horseback who had come as far as the mill pond. The city presented a very pleasing appearance as they entered. The fruit trees were all in bloom and the gardens, fences and dwellings along Main Street were all in good order. The people not involved with the welcoming committee lined the street. They waved banners and flags to welcome the conference visitors.

Three dedicatory meetings were held on Saturday and one on Sunday morning, During one of the meetings George Atkin and Hugh S. Gowans were sustained as councilors to Bishop John S. Rowberry. After the Sunday meeting the visitors began their journey back to the City. They were accompanied for some distance by Captain George Atkin and compnay.

George Atkin participated in operation rescue. He made several trips back across the plains to help bring starving and freezing emigrants to the Salt Lake Valley.

In 1876, both John S. Rowberry and George Atkin were called on missions to Great Britain. They were both set apart on 9 October. John Rowberry returned in July 1877 and George Atkin returned in November. In October of 1877 a general conference of the branches in the Tooele

Valley was held and the Tooele Stake was formed. Six Branches were made wards and new bishops were called. On December 1, 1877 George Atkin was called as Stake Clerk, historian and Superintendent of the Stake Sunday Schools. He served in those capacities through the tenure of three stake presidents which amounted to 16 years of service. George Atkin was particularly adapted to secretarial work and business management.

George was an ordained Seventy. When the 43rd Quorum of Seventy was organized in the Tooele Valley, George Atkin was set apart as one of the seven presidents of the quorum. At the time of his death he was the senior president of the quorum.

George was active in civic and political life. When the Peoples Party was organized, George was elected as secretary to chairman William H. Lee. At the election in 1871 when Hugh S. Gowans was elected Mayor, George Atkin was elected to the City Council. He was elected for two year terms in 1873, 1879 and 1881. In 1883 George was elected Mayor.

George Atkin had an active social life. He loved music and took an active part in many of the local musical organizations. George loved flowers and cultivated many varieties around his home. He also loved dancing and was dignified and stately on his bearing. He was a beautiful dancer and took a leading part in the management of the dances.

George was very quite and unassuming in his manner. He never wished to burden anyone with his personal cares. He was broad-minded and deliberate in his judgements. When he made a final decision on any matter, he was generally right and fair to all concerned. George died on 1 Jan 1899 in his 63rd year. He was buried on 3 Jan in the Tooele City Cemetery.