

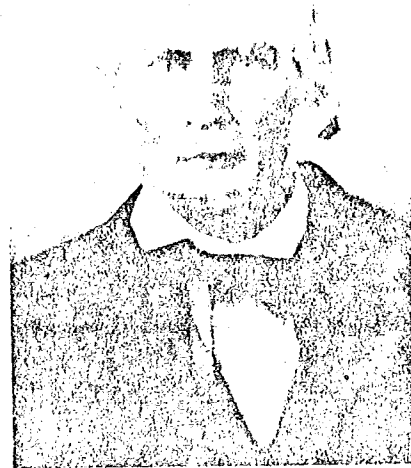
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JOHN NEFF II

John Neff II was born in Strasburg, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, September 19, 1794, a son of John and Barbara Herr Neff. The Neff family were of Dutch-Swiss lineage, while the Herr family were of Swiss-English descent. Early in life John was interested in farming and livestock. He operated a woolen factory, a distillery and had extensive land and livestock interests.

January 12, 1822, he married Mary Barr. They were the parents of ten children, namely: Barbara Matilda, Franklin, Amos Herr, Cyrus, Mary Ann, Susanna, Benjamin Barr, Amanda, John III and Elizabeth. The Mormon elders visited Strasburg early in the year 1844 and a meeting was held in the schoolhouse near the Neff home. The Neff family were in attendance and were converted to the Latter-day Saint faith at this meeting. The preacher was Elder Henry Deem. A short time later, John was baptized and from then until the day of his death, this new religion was to him the most precious thing in his life.

In the spring of 1844, John, his wife Mary and daughter Barbara visited the Prophet Joseph Smith at Nauvoo. They stayed at the Mansion House with the Prophet's family, had



John Neff II. Builder of the Neff Mill.

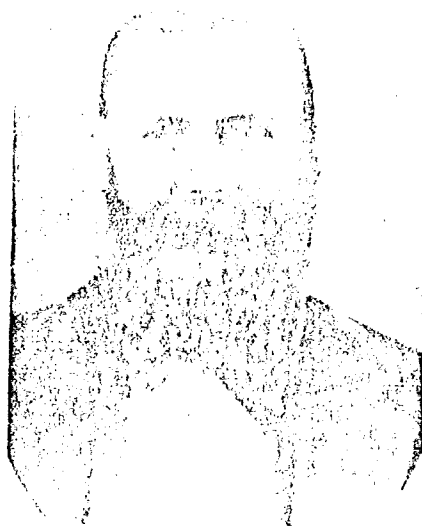
thousand dollars to the cause of the Church during this visit. Returning to their home with a firm conviction that God was truly speaking through the young prophet, they began to make arrangements to sell their property in Pennsylvania and cast their lot with the persecuted, despised Saints at Nauvoo.

Six weeks after they had visited Nauvoo, they were shocked to learn of the martyrdom of the prophet. Undaunted in their determination to serve the Lord in accordance with their new faith, they sold much of their property at a great sacrifice and in the spring of 1846,

the entire family joined the Saints who were in the midst of the exodus from Illinois. John Neff's teams and equipment consisted of the best available and it proved a great blessing to the Church that one with the means to do so was willing to spend for the common good and join them in their poverty and desolation. There was much illness and suffering during the fall and winter and many died, including their own son Cyrus, a young man twenty years of age.

This exodus was a tragic experience in the history of the Saints. One of the pioneers, James Young, wrote: "We are leaving our homes today to cross the frozen river. We must not look back, but placing our faith in God, we must leave our destiny in His hands. The little children cry much of the time and suffer with the cold."

The Neff family stayed at Winter Quarters the winter of 1846-47 and operated the flour mill. They also assisted in the preparation being made for the first pioneer company to begin its journey across the Plains. The first company left in the spring of 1847 and the Neff family became part of the third company. This was Jedediah M. Grant's hundred, Joseph Noble's fifty and Amos Herr Neff's ten. Amos was the twenty-two-year-old son of John and Mary. The oldest son, Franklin, at the request of Brigham Young, went to the mill in Winter Quarters.



Franklin Neff, Miller of Neff's Mill.

The family spent the winter of 1847 and 1848 in the old fort in Salt Lake City, but in the spring of 1848 they moved to Mill Creek and immediately started to cultivate the soil, dig ditches and get water out of Mill Creek for irrigation purposes. They also started the construction of a flour mill that spring. There has been some dispute as to which flour mill operated in the Salt Lake Valley first. The Chase Mill and also the one built by President Young were probably operating before the Neff Mill, which commenced operating October 18, 1848. The other two mills, however, only

crushed the wheat. The Neff Mill was the first to use the bolting process and farmers came from forty miles distant with their grains to the Neff Mill. The demand was so great for the white flour that people coming from a distance waited nearly a week at times before getting their wheat ground. The bolts were made in a circular form about three feet in diameter and seven or eight feet long. The cloth material consisted of the best quality silk.

John Neff also built a sawmill and a shingle mill. He and his sons put the first road into Neff's Canyon and after that the canyon took their name.

Two Indian children were raised by the Neff family, an Indian boy and girl who had been stolen by another tribe and offered for sale. The children grew to adulthood in their home, loving their adoptive parents.

John Neff was a credit to his religion. He served his fellowmen, was a strict observer of the Word of Wisdom, attended church and with scrupulous fidelity performed every task assigned to him. He was a hard worker and a man of rare business ability.

A tribute to John's generosity and kindness was paid to him by Orson Pratt, taken from Pratt's *History of Utah*. "A conspicuous example of fairness and philanthropy was John Neff II, the pioneer builder of Mill Creek. When flour commanded as high as a dollar a pound he would not accept more than six cents a pound, the standard tithing office price, nor would he sell it at all except to the needy, utterly refusing to speculate himself or to encourage others to do so out of the necessities of the poor."

At John Neff's death on May 9, 1869, President Young sent a number of his carriages to Mill Creek to follow the funeral procession. At that time the roads were rough and it took most of the day to make the trip to the Salt Lake Cemetery and back.



Neff Mill in East Millcreek.
Back view showing pond that was used for baptisms by the early settlers of Salt Lake Valley.

The procession was over a mile long and many light and heavy lumber wagons accompanied the carriages, testifying to the fact that there were those among both the poor and the wealthy who loved John Neff and called him "friend."

—Verna May Seely Carter

Located in DUP files is a copy of a letter written to Spencer Clawson May 10, 1897, by Amos H. Neff, John's third child, in which he says:

"Having been a witness to some of the many acts of kindness by the late John Neff from the time we left Nauvoo during the trials and hardships to Salt Lake and some years after we arrived in the Valley, I feel it my duty due my father as a pioneer to have a short history put in the Church records."

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