

NEFF HISTORY

In 1681 Charles II, King of England, granted a charter to William Penn, conveying to him that portion of North America now called Pennsylvania. Penn immediately started a distribution of circulars and commenced an extensive lecture tour throughout Switzerland and Germany, describing the fertility of the soil and other advantages in this New World. He laid particular stress on the freedom of religious worship.

In 1682 Penn made a voyage from England to America and took possession of the property. He brought many presents for the Indians and made treaties with them by purchase of their lands, which made them confidential and permanent friends. This friendship continued until the date of his death in 1718.

In 1684 Penn went to Europe again, continued his lectures and distribution of pamphlets, describing in more detail the fruitfulness of the land, the climate, his treaties with the Indians, and the freedom of religious belief which settlers would enjoy. He continued this advertisement for a period of fifteen years. He then returned to America with his wife and children.

In 1701 we again find him in England, working particularly among the Swiss and German Mennonites, Quakers, and other religious organizations which were opposed to going to war. Unable to agree with those in power, these non-resistants were objects of the most bitter persecutions occurring in France, Switzerland, and Germany. It is estimated that over 500,000 Huguenots escaped from France alone from 1685 to 1720. Many of the Swiss and German Mennonites were driven from England to Germany where they found themselves no better off in Germany than they were in England.

Hans Herr, born in 1639, was a member of the Mennonite society and was a prominent minister of that denomination. When religious persecution became unendurable in England, he with many of his followers emigrated to Germany. After persecution had broken out in their new settlement and the Mennonites were again subjected to the most cruel treatment, the Rev. Hans Herr, with some of his associates, visited Penn in London in 1707 and arranged terms with him for a colonization of that portion of the new land now called Lancaster County, Pa. In 1708 Hans Herr and seven of his associates purchased 10,000 acres of land on the south side of Pequot Creek. This small group came to America.

After thoroughly investigating the conditions then prevalent in America, one of their number was sent back to Europe to induce their friends and relatives to come to America and join the Mennonite Colony. As a result of this visit, over one hundred families, including the Herrs, Neffs and Barrs came to America in 1709 and joined the Lancaster County settlement. Their descendants are now scattered in all parts of the United States and other countries. Many became prominent ministers, physicians, lawyers, statesmen and civil and mechanical engineers.

John Neff, the Utah pioneer of 1847, was born in 1794 and died in 1869. He was the son of John Neff, who was the son of Dr. John H. Neff. The Rev. Jacob Neff was born in 1724 and died in 1814. Reverend Jacob Neff married Anna Herr Brackbill, the daughter of Fannie Herr who was the daughter of John Herr, the son of Rev. Hans Herr.

Barbara Herr, Mother of John Neff of Utah, was a daughter of Christian Herr, born in 1762, died in 1821. Christian was the son of John Herr and John Herr was the son of Rev. Hans Herr.

Mary Barr, wife of John Neff I of Utah, was a daughter of Elizabeth Herr. Elizabeth Herr was a daughter of John Herr, son of the Rev. Hans Herr.

John Neff, the founder of Mill Creek, was born in Strasburg, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Sept 19, 1794. His parents were John and Barbara Herr Neff. They had considerable wealth and gave their son a good education, for the times, both in English and in German. He was particularly good in penmanship.

The Neff family comes of Dutch Swiss lineage while the Herr family is of Swiss-English lineage. Both families were established in Pennsylvania in the early colonization of that state.

John Neff, early in life, was interested in farming and livestock. His father and Mr. Frank Kindig owned and operated a successful woolen factory, but later on the business failed and John, although quite young, secured the factory at an auction sale. He got it at a very low price as the neighbors, out of respect for the Neff family, would not bid against the son in purchasing the father's property. He also operated a distillery and had extensive land and livestock interests. It has been stated that at one time his holdings amounted to half a million dollars.

In politics he was a whip and was intimately acquainted with President Buchanan, Theddeus Stevens, and other leading politicians of that time. He also met General Lafayette on his last visit to America and delighted in describing the personal appearance of the distinguished Frenchman.

The Neff family ranked high and was honored and respected in the community. Notwithstanding the interest in the distillery business, the family was very temperate. John Neff would not touch liquor or tobacco in any form.

In 1821 John Neff married Mary Barr, A daughter of Christian and Mary Brennaman Barr.

Grandpa Neff, a Mennonite, was five feet six inches tall and weighed about 140 pounds. Grandma was about the same height, weighed about 160 pounds, and was very handsome. My Mother told me that she was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen, a splendid executive, kind and sympathetic in her nature, but firm and very determined in her convictions. Grandpa and Grandma were both especially kind to the poor and to strangers. Those in need were always welcome at their home.

The Mormon Elders visited Strasburg some time before the summer of 1844. A meeting was held in a school house near the Neff home, and the preacher was Elder Henry Deem. John Neff was converted to the L. D. S. faith at this meeting. Soon after this he was baptized and from then until the day of his death this new religion was to him the most precious thing in existence.

In the spring of 1844, Grandpa and Grandma together with their daughter Barbara, visited the Prophet Joseph Smith at Nauvoo. They stayed at the Mansion House with the prophet's family, had many conversations with him in private, and heard his prophetic voice many times from the pulpit.

They were very much impressed with this visit and returned to their home in Pa. with a still firmer conviction that God was speaking through this young prophet. It has been said that on this visit Grandpa gave the prophet Joseph several thousand dollars. On their return home they began to make arrangements to sell their property in Pennsylvania and cast their lot with the persecuted and despised people of Nauvoo.

The Prophet Joseph had told them that he did not expect to live long. Notwithstanding this warning, his martyrdom six weeks later after they had left Nauvoo came as quite a shock. But, 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. Grandpa's teams and equipment consisted of the best that money could buy, and it proved a great blessing to the Church that one with wealth who was willing and did spend for the common good should join them in their poverty and desolation.

Probably this exodus was the most tragic experience in the history of the Saints. One of the pioneers, Mr. James Young, writes, "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."

When Grandpa's family reached Nauvoo, the once thriving industrial center had now become desolate. One can appreciate their feelings when they contrasted the present situation with that of their previous visit at Nauvoo when everything hummed with industry and life. Everything now was lonely and silent, and great trains of covered wagons driven by both men and women, could be seen wending their way towards the setting sun.

To one without faith their destination seemed nothing but sorrow, sickness, and death in an unknown wilderness. It took real faith and courage for those who of their own initiative had left a home surrounded with every comfort and luxury where they could have lived in peace and plenty among devoted friends and relatives. Grandpa's family, took its place in the great caravan and moved on to the Missouri River. They camped at Winter Quarters during the winter of 1846.

President Young has the following to say about the trying conditions at this time and of the assistance of John Neff:

"We left Nauvoo in February, 1846, made our own roads through Iowa (except some forty or fifty miles), built bridges, cut down timber, turned out 500 men to go to Mexico, came this side of the Missouri River and there wintered. How did you live there? Do you know how you got anything to eat? Brethern came to me saying, 'We must go to Missouri. Can we not take our families and go there to work?' Do you know to this day how you lived? I will tell you and then you will remember it. I had not five dollars in money to start with, but I went to work to build a mill which I knew we would want only a few months, that cost \$3600. I gave notice that I would employ every bushel of potatoes I turned into a half bushel of wheat. How did I do that? By faith. I went to Brother Neff who had just come into the place and asked him for, and received \$2600, though he did not know where the money was going. He kept the mill and it died on his hands. I said, 'God bless him forever, for it was the money that he brought from Pennsylvania that saved thousands of men, women, and children from starving.' I handled and dictated it and everything went off smoothly and prosperously." (Discourses of Brigham Young, page 477)

A couple of months later, the Neff family, with the exception of the eldest son, Franklin, who President Young had asked to stay and operate the mill another year, crossed the river on ferry boats prepared for that purpose and became part of the third company of pioneers, arriving in Salt Lake on October 2, 1847. The family consisted of the father and mother and the following children: Barbara Matilda, Franklin, Amos Herr, Cyrus N., Mary Ann, Susannah, Benjamin Herr, John, and Elizabeth. Cyrus died on March 4, 1847, a few months before the family left for the west. No doubt his death caused the family to wait for the third company. The family brought with them a number of milk cows, sharing the milk with those less fortunate on the plains. They also brought seeds and plants from which was developed the finest orchard in the state at one time.

They spent the winter of '47 and '48 in the old Salt Lake City fort, and in the spring of 1848 they moved to Hill Creek. They immediately started to cultivate the ground, dig ditches, and get water out of Hill Creek for irrigation purposes. They also started the construction of a flour mill that spring.

Their last experience in operating factories and mills in Pennsylvania and in Winter Quarters qualified them for the milling business here. They had this in mind before leaving Winter Quarters, as they brought blacksmith tools, iron, and other equipment with them. They went to the mouth of Little Cotterwood Canyon and brought back some granite stones from which they cut the burrs for the flour mill. There has been some disputes as to whether the Neff Mill was the first flour mill operated west of the Missouri River. Some people claim that the Chase mill, located near the present site of Liberty Park was operated a few months before the Neff Mill which began operation on October 10, 1848.

After diligent inquiry of people who were acquainted with conditions at that time, I am convinced that the Chase Mill and also the one built by President Young were in operation before the Neff Mill. The other two mills, however, only crushed the wheat. The Neff Mill was the first to use the belting process, this being the reason that 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. I well remember the old bolts and granite burrs. The bolts were made in a circular form, about three feet in diameter, and seven or eight feet long. The material consisted of the best quality of silks.

Grandpa Neff also built a saw mill and shingle mill. In those days it was the common law that the men who constructed the main roads in the different forks of the canyons had the first right to the timber located in that part of the canyon. The Neffs put the first road in Neff's canyon, and after that the canyon took that name. This is the way most of the canyon forks were named in those days.

When the Neff family came to Salt Lake, the father and each one of the sons carried around their waists under their clothing large leather belts. These belts were arranged with pockets made to hold twenty-dollar gold peices. When filled with gold, they weighed several pounds. They were worn continually. Much of their gold was also carried in chests. It would be interesting to know just the amount of money they brought with them. It must have amounted to at least more than \$100,000.

Brother Cyrus states that when he was a boy of twelve or fourteen years of age, he very often went to Salt Lake with Grandpa Neff. Before returning home, he would always visit President Young and give him several hundred dollars, and many times it amounted to a thousand dollars and more.

He gave a thousand dollars to President Young to assist in the erection of the first penitentiary. In the late fifties, when there was talk of the church establishing the United Order, Grandpa Neff turned over to Brigham Young all his real and personal property, the real estate by deed. Some time later, President Young returned all the property stating that the Saints were not ready for that order.

Grandpa Neff avoided publicity and would not accept any political or ecclesiastical position which brought him before the public. He was reserved and modest and in giving alms he preferred to follow the admonition of the Saviour in not letting his right hand know what his left hand did. He was a strict observer of the Word of Wisdom, always attended Church, and with scrupulous fidelity performed every task assigned to him.

Being closely associated with President Young and others of the authorities who were practicing polygamy, it has been a question in the minds of many of his descendants why he did not enter into the practice of plural marriage. I have no doubt but what he was converted to the principle, but his home life was so ideal, having a wife whom he always adored and one who to him was the personification of all that was great and noble, that he no doubt hesitated to bring about a condition which would disturb in the slightest degree that splendid harmony.

Grandpa was a very orderly man and a hard worker. He had the very best equipment on his farm and in his mills. He was a man of rare business ability and was successful in every business undertaking. His generosity, however, was so great that at his death he had much less in dollars and cents than he had had in Pennsylvania. He had a fine carriage and the most beautiful harness I have ever seen, with brass mountings. He took great pride in his horses with this fine equipment and did notable service with them, especially at funerals. At the settlement of the estate, my father came into possession of this carriage and harness, and we children had the privilege of riding in the carriage a few times. It was seldom used, however, except for funerals.

Grandma Neff had entire charge of the home, and there her word was law. She was a hard worker herself and expected those whom she employed to maintain the high degree of efficiency that characterized her work.

Grandpa and Grandma raised an Indian girl, named Leah, and an Indian boy, named Pete. Both children were taken captives by one of the warring bands of Indians. They were sold to Grandpa Neff. When these little Indian children were brought here, their bodies were very thin, but they had large stomachs, showing that their food had not been adequate for proper growth. I heard my father say that a few days after they were brought here, they were discovered on the ditch bank eating grasshoppers. They both grew to be large in stature, tall and graceful. Leah was very proud, powdering her face even in those early days. Both the girl and boy, as they grew to man and womanhood, associated on an equality with the children of the neighborhood. Leah was very devoted to Grandma Neff, particularly so during the time Grandma was bedfast. If Grandma felt a preference for her own children and grandchildren, one would never have known it by her treatment of Leah. After Grandma's death, Leah went off with a white man and died a few years later.

Pete was a strong man, but got in the habit of drinking with some of the boys and would often get into fights. I never knew of anything cruel or wicked in the make-up of either the boy or the girl. Pete was a wonderful fisherman and enjoyed the sport very much. After Grandma's death he stayed at our home.

John Neff was always generous and kind. The following is from Orson Pratt's History of Utah: "A conspicuous example of fairness and philanthropy was John Neff, Sr., 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."

It is quite uncommon indeed to find a man so full of brotherly love that he would sell a ton of flour for \$120 when he could have taken \$2000 a ton for it.

At Grandpa's death in 1869, President Young sent a number of his carriages to Mill Creek to follow in the 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. The procession was over a mile long, and many lightened heavy lumber wagons accompanied the carriages.

Looking back now over those sixty years and comparing them with conditions of today, one is impressed with the debt of gratitude the present generation owes to the past. Firm in their religious convictions and as devoted to their leaders as probably any people have ever been, they fought through those trials and sacrifices with a courage and fortitude rarely found in the history of mankind. Notwithstanding this wonderful heritage, I wonder if the present generation is living up to the possibilities of a legacy far greater than gold or silver, or all the material things this life might offer.