

Thomas O'bray



Life History

# LIFE HISTORY OF THOMAS OBRAY

*Written By Request Of The Obray Family*

*By Annie Obray Oldham*

Having been requested to combine and write an account of the life and labors of my grandfather Thomas Obray, I shall try to do so, with appreciation for the findings of Caroline O. Summers, Emma Facer, Marella Davidson and others who have collected and written short life sketches which I have used parts of, as far as possible.

I want all into whose hands this account may come, to fully understand that the person of whom I write was no angel, but a man who had a testimony of the message which he heard, and was a willing and cheerful servant to the cause of truth for the remainder of his life and time. He didn't shrink from living the principles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints even though it meant imprisonment.

Thomas was born at Pembroke Dock, Pembroke, Wales, July 25, 1821, and christened January 8, 1832 at St. Mary's Church Pembroke.

As a boy he was in the choir in Wales and always loved to sing.

His father is listed as a Shipwright, a profession which the boys followed also. John, George and Thomas went to Sheerness, Kent for work, where the L.D.S. Elders found them and explained the Gospel to them. Thomas harkened to the truth and was baptized September 25, 1844 by Elder W. Henshaw at Sheerness, Kent, England. On May 13, 1849 he was ordained a Priest. and on February 1, 1850 he was made an Elder by Thomas Margetts.

He spent 6 years preaching the gospel in Kent and was instrumental in converting the William Brenchley family, who appreciated this act by a life long and close friendship.

In 1852 he was ordained a High Priest by Lorenzo Snow who was a Mission Supervisor of that part of England as well as Italy and Switzerland. Elder Snow was in Malta and needed help and more supplies, and sent for Elder Thomas Obray to come help him and bring along a good amount of pamphlets and books to use in the Malta district. Here is where a close friendship started between Elder Snow and Thomas.

The incident is told that Thomas told Elder Snow that the time would come, if he lived for the blessing, that Lorenzo would lead this Church. Lorenzo felt to doubt that this would ever happen but told Thomas that if it did, he would appreciate it if Thomas would add Lorenzo to his name. Lorenzo Snow did become President of the Church and Thomas signed his name Thomas Lorenzo Obray from that time on. The records, of St. Mary's Church shows that he was just christened Thomas. Thomas told my mother of this incident.

From letters recorded in the "Millennial Star" of March 10, 1852, written by Elder Snow to Elder Franklin D. Richards, telling of the conditions and needs of this Malta mission and requesting the help of Elder Obray, he left England and went to Malta with the needed supplies and books, on April 25, 1852. The following year, April 23, 1853, he was sent back to England on account of ill health. He must have recovered and been able to return to Malta and labor, for in October of 1853 it is recorded, he was released.

While in Malta, Elder Obray wrote to England that the Branch in Malta consisted of 26 members, 3 Elders, 2 Priests, 2 Teachers, and 1 Deacon. The work was hindered much because of the large amount of Catholics that were there. One letter said, "These Catholics and Protestants are circulating lies as fast as a horse can trot." "But despite all their efforts to stop the work of God on this island, two souls were added since I last wrote and on August 17, 1852 I ordained a good man, an Elder by the name of George Burrage." Brother Burrage later became a Councilor in the Branch Presidency to Elder Obray.

After his release Thomas left for home on the steamship "City of Manchester" on March 22, 1854. The ship was to dock at Philadelphia. The ship stopped at New Brunswick, Canada and picked up the Shelton family who were bound for Zion. This family consisted of Charles, his wife, Rebecca and six children; five sisters of Charles, Ann, Martha, Louisa, Eliza and Emily and a small brother, Albert. The mother of the Shelton family had passed away before this time and the father, whose health was not good, felt he could serve the Lord where he was in New Brunswick, so he did not come to America.

Thomas joined this group, and came with them to St. Louis, where outfits were purchased to further continue the journey. When they reached Fort Leavenworth he married Louis, with Elder Alonzo Buckland performing the rites on June 24, 1854.

Rebecca, Charles Shelton's wife took cholera and died leaving their six little children, who also became ill and passed away. Louisa had the measles and while recovering contracted cholera and passed away, a bride of only three weeks. All of this sorrow left Thomas and Charles very sad, but still determined to pursue the journey to the "Zion of their dreams". Thomas continued with the Shelton family and arrived in Salt Lake on September 29, 1854. Here Thomas married Louisa's sister Martha. Thomas and Matha spent the winter of 1854 in Tooele and took the little boy Albert Shelton to live with them.

The Following spring the family moved to Ogden, and it was here on December 8, 1855 that a baby girl came to Thomas and Martha. He was very proud of her and according to the life story of Eliza Shelton Keeler, Matha's younger sister, who helped care for the new mother and baby, Thomas would lift the baby up and sing and dance around the room with her. This baby was named Louisa after his first wife.

About this time Thomas met Caroline Brenchley, a daughter of the William Brenchley who he had converted to the church in Kent, England. She had been caring for the blind child of a Dr. Wiseman in England and had come with the family to America on May 25, 1856. They had sailed on the ship "Horizon". She had met Sarah Fisher along the route somewhere and the two girls pushed a handcart each across the Plains in the Martin Handcart company and walked every step of the way. After a renewal of their friendship Thomas and Caroline were married in the Endowment House on August 2, 1857. They were sealed by Brigham Young in his office. They spent one winter at "Maughans Fort" in Cache Valley. They built log houses and planted some grains. In April of 1858, President Young ordered the outlying settlers and in fact all L.D.S. families, to move south as the word of an army being sent west to further exterminate the Saints had come to their attention. This was known as the "Utah War". the Saints left their comfortable homes and put straw around so rather than leave a nice house for Army personnel, a fire could be set and bare ground greet the army. The settlers moved to Brigham City temporarily. They hurried their moving too, as the Indians were becoming quite troublesome. The grain harvested in the fall of 1857 was stored in their houses when they left.

On July 4th, several men returned to Maughans Fort to see how the grain they had stored in their houses was. They found the Indians had stolen all of it. The volunteer grain was ready to cut, so the following men set out to harvest it. They got 20 bushel to the acre. There were Francis Gunnell, Zial Riggs, John Reese, Thomas Obray, Robert and Alex Hill.

By October the differences between the army, and Utah officials was settled but still President Young advised the families to remain in Brigham City. However, several families did return to Maughans Fort. Thomas Obray, and family, R.C. Pinney a lad of 13 years who worked for Obray, Frank Gunnell, Dunkin Gardener, Zial Riggs, the Clayton families, Robert Hill and wife, and there was also two young boys, Timothy and Henry Parkinson.

Peter Maughan kept in close touch with the settlers in Cache Valley, He returned in the spring of 1859 settling permanently.

The families settled in the cabins chinking up the cracks between the logs to make it warmer for the cold and snowy winter they knew was coming. One or two of the families brought along a little flour with them but it didn't last too long and during that winter bread was a scarce item. The wheat that was harvested was boiled and eaten with milk as Thomas Obray and some of the others had brought a few cows. The settlers were fortunate in hunting game such as wild ducks and geese in the river bottoms were plentiful and wild chickens were on the foothills. However, the ammunition was scarce and hard to come by. The Clayton family men folks were good hunters and knew how to use snowshoes. They would harness themselves to their long sleds and go into the valley and in the mountains and be gone for two or three days at a time and would always return with an elk or deer on their sleighs. They would return and haul the rest of their meat which they had stored away unable to haul it all at one time. This was freely distributed and the settlers had all the fresh meat they needed during the winter. Turnips were used as a substitute for potatoes.

By now the Thomas O Bray families consisted of several children and as land was open for homesteading Thomas moved up to what is now a part of the North Field and was called Petersburg. It was about this time that the settlers who were in Avon were counseled to locate where the town of Paradise is now, due to Indian troubles.

Thomas had homesteaded the site where Ellis Hansen lives and what was then called "the springs". A log house was built for Martha and her family and one further south, nearer the hill road, for Caroline and her family.

By now Thomas had married another wife, Ruth Nuttall Bradshaw, who evidently had also lived in Wellsville, as Uncle George S. O Bray, told me of a trip several of "the spring" families children took to go see Aunt Ruth and children. These children had been set at weeding a patch of sugar cane and decided to get themselves a stick horse and whip and ride through the fields down to Wellsville to pay a visit to Aunt Ruth. They laughed and ate on the canes, first the whip and later the horse, as they trudged along. By this time Grandpa O Bray missed his workers, so he got on a horse and started after the children. He was vexed indeed to find them almost to Hyrum and made them walk home again.

Aunt Martha was never very strong, and in 1881 she suffered a stroke. Up to this time she was active in early Relief Society and an able help in times of sickness. She lived 6 years as an invalid and Caroline took loving care of her, having moved down to the springs home.

Ruth and her family now came to the corner log home and her family joined the others in helping on the farm.

My grandmother Caroline told me of a time when their bed was made on top of a bin of wheat. During the night one of the lower boards came loose and all the wheat poured out. She sat down and laughed while Grandfather scooped up the wheat as best he could so she could remake the bed.

The families grew and all had to work on the farm and help raise whatever they had to eat or sell in Salt Lake for clothes to wear. Even the girls had to learn to work and herd cattle and sheep and hogs. Grandfather was real upset at Aunt Ada when he saw her riding a big fat hog, to and from the pasture. She had trained the pig to be ready and when she wanted to go anywhere to give her a lift.

In 1882, on June 21, Grandfather was called on a Mission to England. Marcalla Davidson (Nellie's daughter in law, has a copy of his official call, signed by Pres. Taylor, George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith.) He sailed on the ship "Nevada". While he was gone, the older sons took care of the farm and families.

A year after Aunt Marth's death, Thomas was sentenced to Utah Penitentiary for five months for Pologamy. This was from May 24, 1888 to April 1, 1889 when he was released. He served again from April 24, 1890 for 5 months to August 9, 1890. These times were very anxious ones for all of the families concerned.

There were men in Paradise who made it their chief interest to notify the county Deputies as to the whereabouts of any of the Brethren wanted by the law and to guide the Deputies to their homes. Several of the older boys were now married and settled in homes of their own in Paradise and who would hear the Deputies buggies come into town and would run over the foot hills east of the houses and help their fathers escape detection. The men would go down into the brush in the Bottoms and remain hidden while the "Depts" would pace along the top of the hills and watch. This happened many times as my father John W. and Uncle Joe would tell us of them hurrying back up home and to bed before being found out as the messengers.

Grandfather did the best he could for all of his families. Each fall he would have ground a 1000 to 1500 lbs. of flour, kill five or six hogs, and this he would haul to Salt Lake and bring back a load of goods, consisting of clothes, shoes and hats and other necessary things needed by a large family. He would select a dozen pairs of shoes and hats of different sizes, knowing they would fit some member of the family. Once he bought a used overcoat for \$2.50 in a second hand store, which was used and handed down through most of the boys, each one getting his share of the wear as long as it fit him.

Grandfather was staunch in his faith and tried to live as he knew was right. He was fearless in advocating the principles he had accepted and believed in so heartily. He was cheerful and loved music. His talent of singing has passed down to most of his children and grandchildren. He was a generous man and ever willing to give and share with those less fortunate. The farm work became burdensome as he became older, and the boys had married and left the home to begin their own families so lots were purchased and a house was built for my grandmother Caroline on the corner by Cliff Obrays present home, which is the original site of my own father's home, purchased from grandfather.

A frame and log house was built on part of the same lot, for Aunt Ruth and her family. These moves were made when the "Springs" was sold to Peter O. Hansen, Ellis' father.

Grandmother Caroline O Bray lived in her cozy little log house when I was a little girl, so I remember her well. She died November 20, 1910 when I was teaching school in Elwood, Box Elder County, due to an accident and being thrown from a buggy and breaking her arm.

Grandfather O Bray stands out in my mind as the "Man with a Hoe". He always carried a hoe on his shoulder and would chop off a weed here and there, as he walked along. I was always thinking I might just happen to be a weed, some day and get hacked off.

**THOMAS OBRAY** was the father of 28 children, Martha had five: *Louisa*, who married John H. Gibbs, *Emma Jane*, who married Alma Cades Jackson, *Thomas L.*, who married Caroline Elina Norman, *George S.* who married (1) Lydia King, (2) Sara Orgill, and *Annie*, she married John Edward Thomas. Caroline had nine: *Samuel*, who married Mary Ann James; *Sarah Ann*, who married Orson Smith; *John William*, who married Isabella Burgess; *Robert Henery* and *Robert Brenchley*, who died as children, also *Marian*, a daughter who died after being poisoned by a black bug; *Joseph*, who married (1) Elizabeth Olsen, (2) Margaret Tams; *Ezra*, who married (1) Lydia Howells, (2) Rebecca Louisa Hall; *Ida*, who married (1) George Housley, (2) James Powell.

Ruth had 14: *Rosara*, who married William Henry Thomas; *Hyrum*, died 1 day old; *Hannah* who married John Edward Miles; *Selina*, who married John Abbott McArthur; *Charles*, who married Margaret Ann Miles; *Ada*, who married Thomas Miles; *Eva*, who married Samuel William Lloyd; *Caroline*, died as child; *Elizabeth*, who married George Isaac Miles; *Maud*, died young; *David*, who married Nora Miles; *Hilda*, died as a child; *Ruth Eleanor*, who married Donald Davidson; *Lydia*, who married Lloyd Oldham.

Thomas suffered terribly with exema for some time before his death on the 21st of October 1899 at Paradise, and was buried in the Paradise Cemetery.

His descendants would be hard to number, all appreciate the heritage that they were left by this faithful Latter-Day Saint.

#### Sources Used In Compiling This Life History:

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