

A HISTORY OF THE SANTS Compiled by Donald J. Hepworth

The name "Sant" is Welch for "Saint," so the ancestors of the Sants in Cheshire in the Middlewich area may have originally come from Wales.

Ages ago, Cheshire was under the sea; a tilting of the Earth's crust formed an inland sea. As the sea water evaporated, great beds of salt were laid down.

Middlewich is a small town about 150 miles Northeast of London and about 25 miles Southeast of Liverpool. The name Middlewich was once spelled Middlewych, wych being the old Roman name for salt. Thus the word Middlewich translates to "the city in the middle of the salt mines."

Middlewich was occupied by early Brittons who mined and purified the salt. The Romans found the Brittons purifying salt by pouring dissolved salt upon hot charcoal. They improved the process and occupied the area for about 300 years, withdrawing about 410 A.D. Our Sant ancestors were involved in the salt industry for many generations. In the middle 1700's canals were dug, and salt was transported in horse drawn boats to the sea, where it was shipped all over Europe. Coal from East Cheshire was barged to the salt works to make the coke for the heat to evaporate the water from the raw brine in the purification process.

Able Sant did not work in the salt industry but was a master sawyer in a saw mill with his son Tom. The government in Australia requested sawyers from England as they were desperate for expert labor. No volunteers came forth to the call. While the men were working in the saw mill, files were placed in many of their lunch pails. The men were accused of stealing company equipment, and the lunch pails were searched. A file was found in Tom's lunch pail, but on seeing this, his anxious father stepped forward and claimed the lunch pail was his. Sixty-seven men had files in their lunch pails, and all of them were shipped on the same boat to Australia as criminals, the punishment for their "crime" being a 7 year sentence to hard labor. Thus the government got their skilled labor at no cost, and Able Sant was torn from his wife and 12 children, never to see them again.

In Australia, Able was treated as a convict for 3 months, before taken to Melbourne where he worked as a slave laborer in the saw mill. After three years he was released but was not allowed to return to England. He wrote letters faithfully to his family in England, but never knew if they were ever sent or received, as he never received any answer. Able was 15 years alone in Australia, settling in Combind, Australia, and finally marrying an Australian girl, Ellen Smith, who bore him one more son Isaac. Many descendants of Isaac are now scattered about both Australia and New Zealand.

Abel's son John married Mary Shaw, and they lived in Middlewich, England. He had a bay mare and a river boat. He earned a living for this family by boating freight and salt to and from Liverpool and Manchester on the Manchester Canal and the rivers. The boat was towed from the bank with the bay mare; his wife or one of his children would ride on the boat and steer it, keeping it in the middle of the channel.

In January of 1842, missionaries from America met him on a boating trip. Elder Thomas McCann told him about Joseph Smith's vision and the restoration of the gospel. He exclaimed, "This is what I have been looking for all of my life." He attended several meetings and asked to be baptized before he returned home. It is recorded that upon coming up out of the water and being confirmed he received the gift of tongues. This gift was with him throughout the rest of his life, as well as the interpretation of tongues on several occasions. John was the first convert in Middlewich, and the Middlewich Branch membership records show this, and give the dates of his ordinations and the baptismal dates of many of his children and his relatives and also the relatives of his wife, Mary Shaw.

Upon reaching home, he was met at the door by his wife who had a kettle of boiling water in her hands. Although she had received no work of his baptism, in some way it was made known to her. "Siree, thee has gone and joined the Mormons. Don't thee come in 'ere or I'll scald thee with this kettle of 'ot water!" Overcome by the spirit of Lucifer, no sense or reason would she listen to. John bowed his head, the children wept, and Mary walked the floor crying and sobbing until she had worn herself out.

John removed his shoes and went upstairs to bed. Later, Mary, crept silently up the stairs and peeked in his room. She heard him pour out his heart and soul to his God, and heard him express his great love for her and for the children. She heard him ask God to soften her heart that she too might know the truth.

She wilted, and crept in and plead for his forgiveness. She too was converted and baptized a few months later. The children still living at home were all baptized thus unifying the family once more. The minister came to their house, telling them wicked things about the Mormons. The children were not allowed to go to school, friends and classmates turned against them. They moved to Runcorn to escape the persecution. Here were born two more children, Eliza and Thomas.

Plans were made for them to go to America, and every spare penny was put in the "America Box." They often ate only porridge or sheep's head. Everyone worked and scrimped, but it seemed an impossible task. After five years even John was discouraged. But then one night he had a vision. He saw a ship crossing the water with his family on board. Then he saw a beautiful valley. Many people were traveling to this valley on a broad road in carriages with no horses! It was made known to him that these people were his descendants. After this strange and vivid dream, he and all his family redoubled their efforts.

Their oldest son George got a chance to go to America with two missionaries who were returning home. He would be able to earn more there and would send money home so the family could realize their dream much sooner. With the blessings and prayers of his family he left for America, sailing on the ship Clara Sheeler with 452 saints in the company of Henry E. Phelps. He arrived in New Orleans Jan 11, 1855 and in Salt Lake City on Sep 3, in a company of 46 wagons and 200 saints.

After six more years of scrimping and saving, (19 years since John's baptism) and with George's help, the Sant family's day of immigration drew near. But they were delayed when little Billie (William) became ill. Doctors removed a stone from his bladder without anesthetic, it had not yet been invented. Janie, his sister, held his hand and told him stories during the surgery.

They said a sad farewell to the three little graves of Samuel, Mary, and Joseph who had passed away at ages five, four, and one. They left behind the two oldest girls who had married and who had families. In Liverpool they boarded the sailing ship Brooklin on the 15 of April, 1861. Six weeks on the ocean seemed like an eternity, except for their son John Jr. who was married soon after they sailed and took a honeymoon cruise! The older girls, Margaret and Janie, did cabin work to help pay their passage. Janie was very sick most of the trip, and the family and the Saints prayed for her. She often spoke of her fear of being fed to the fishes.

The family joined a company going to Zion, and a returning missionary David Mustard hauled much of their baggage. At Council Bluffs, they secured a wagon and a yoke of oxen, and began the final lap of their long journey. Job Pingree was in charge of the company. The family walked all the way, even Eliza who was only six.

Jane, who had been so sick on the ocean, and who had never been very strong, felt sick and lagged behind the company. This was very dangerous as there were wolves and Indians were on the warpath. That night as the wagons were drawn into a circle for defense, she was missed. Father John informed the Captain; then he headed back on the trail without waiting for a group of men to be formed to look for her. Mother Mary called the rest of the children together and knelt by the wagon and poured out her heart to her maker.

Meantime, Janie, who had fainted, was revived by the cool early evening air. Picture her fears as she listened to the howls of the wolves and remembered the horrible stories about the Indians. Her father was running down the trail, praying out loud and calling her name. She arose and tried to go in the direction of his voice, but fell from weakness just as her father saw her in the growing darkness. He caught her up in his arms and headed back to camp, soon meeting those who were coming from camp to find them. When Mary saw her pale girl she fell on her knees and with John and the family offered prayers of thanksgiving for her safe return.

The wagon company met a young man coming from Salt Lake to obtain materials for the temple and the tabernacle. He also brought a letter from George, the oldest son who was already in Zion. George was on his way to meet them with food and supplies.

In a few more days they were almost out of food, only having a few tablespoons of flour per person per day. Just when the weary travelers felt they could go no further, a group of wagons was spotted in the distance. Sure enough, it was George. Could any reunion be sweeter? That night, as they circled and prepared the evening meal, they could hardly believe the good food spread on the cloth on the ground. One of the children said, "This must be Zion!" When Janie said "Mother, may I have another cob?" (Cob is English for biscuit) her mother said "Nay Janie, you have had plenty this time." But the deep voice of George rang out, saying "Give her another cob, give her all she wants." These were the sweetest words she had ever heard, and to her dying day no words ever sounded better.

They arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in September of 1861, the journey from home having taken five long months. They reported to the immigration committee and then discussed what they would do next. George had gone to settle in Cache Valley, in what is now Smithfield, Utah. His wife and family were there waiting for him. So the decision was made that the whole family would join him there. They lived with George and his family in a log cabin with a dirt floor and a sod roof until they could build their own cabin.

Beautifully situated between the Bear River Range on the East and the Wasatch Mountains on the West, the almost level Cache Valley is from 5 to 7 seven miles in width and over 50 miles long. Many rivers and streams enter the valley, making it a lush paradise of growth. The trappers first called it Willow Valley because of the dense willows. It was a favorite rendezvous of the mountain men, and they often stored large caches of furs there; thus it became known as Cache Valley. Brigham Young delayed the settlement of the valley because of the stories of the trappers about the terrible winters and the killing frosts in the spring. But in 1855 a great drought dried up the grasses in the lower valleys and many animals died. Because of this emergency he sent 2500 cattle and horses to Cache Valley to escape the drought. Things went well until November when heavy snows and blizzards engulfed the valley; the feed was covered and many animals died. The hardier animals were driven to Box Elder and Weber valleys, many perishing on the way. About half of the cattle froze to death.

About 1859 or 1860, a group of men were sent to begin a settlement. In the fall their families followed. Cabins had been built, wild hay had been gathered and sheds and corrals constructed. The houses were arranged close together in two rows facing each other, in what was known as "fort" style. The heroism of this first group defies description. They faced a severe winter that almost overwhelmed them in its fury. They were surrounded by hostile Indians who stole their cattle and horses and who might at any time attack them. Several brethren were killed or injured in Indian attacks. The men worked in the fields in groups with their guns always ready. They took turns staying up all night to guard the fort.

When John Sant arrive in 1861, the Indian problem remained. John Sant was appointed as the bugler. His bugle call would summon the men to arms and they would gather at the meeting house for instructions.

On the first of April of 1862 Brother Story issued the order for John to bugle up the men. When all were assembled for instructions, there was great excitement and concern. But nobody seemed to grasp the problem, including the Bishop. When confronted, Brother Story said "April Fools." The men went after him to throw him in the creek, but he put himself in and went over his head in the icy water.

Canals were dug, and dams built to divert the streams for irrigation. The men would work on the dams all day, and the beavers in the streams helped them by working all night on the dams the men had started.

More settlements were begun, Oxford, Clifton, Weston, Preston, and many others. That part of the valley north of the 42nd parallel was later made part of a new territory, the Territory of Idaho. The Indian problem was resolved when an army came from California and almost annihilated the fierce tribes in the Battle Creek Indian War.

In the spring of 1863 or 1864 the family moved to Bear Lake Valley. Frost killed their crops, the winter was severe. They lived in a dugout, eating boiled wheat and what wild game they could obtain. After several years of crop failures they moved to Oxford in 1869. The army had not yet come from California, so they returned to the fort at Oxford each night. Later, cabins were built in Clifton. John Sant was the first Superintendent of Sunday School in Clifton. He has his sons homesteaded and engaged in farming, dairying, and stock raising. He also had a small store at Clifton.

John and his sons Thomas and John were asked to give a blessing to a desperately sick child. The mother was a member, but not the father. After the anointing, John Sr. blessed the child. He promised him that he would recover and grow to manhood, prophesying that he would then be driven from his home for the sake of the gospel. The child was instantly healed and the prophecy was later fulfilled.

John Sant's daughter Eliza learned to weave and do other homemaking skills. She first met Edmund Hepworth when she was 13. He was an old friend of her father, living in nearby Oxford. At the urging of her parents, she became Edmund's second wife at the age of 14. In Oxford a room for Eliza was built onto the home of his first wife Hannah. At age 15 she gave birth to her first son John Edmund, and at age 17 her second son George William was born.

Edmund had a co-op store, a farm, and the family members were all kept very busy. Eliza worked hard weaving and spinning. She was not very well that fall and winter; it was thought she had bowel trouble. She died on her eighteenth birthday, leaving her two small boys for Hannah to raise. Hannah was nursing a daughter just 3 days younger, so she took George and nursed him as her own. She was certainly an angel to the motherless boys. John Edmund's children, Ezra, Jesse, and Lester also loved her and called her "Grandma."

Hannah said that Eliza treated her with love and respect, a quality missing in some plural marriages. Eliza's love for Hannah was returned in great measure.

Eliza had a beautiful singing voice as did all the Sants. Brigham Young, after hearing George Sant sing said “Tenor pleases the ear, but bass cheers the heart.” All of the Sants were musically gifted. They sang and many of them played instruments. Eliza led the singing in meetings and in social affairs. She was tall, dark haired, very pretty, fun loving, a good mother and a good wife.

As Eliza’s mother, Mary Shaw Sant, lay dying, she sang the song “I’ll Praise My Maker While I Have Breath.” As she grew weaker no sound was made but her lips could be seen still forming the words as she departed this life. Her daughter Jane Sant Smith sang the same song on her death bed, and asked that it be sung at her funeral, saying “If I can be permitted to be with you in spirit, I will join in.”

Our Sant ancestors have left us a priceless legacy. We enjoy the blessings of the gospel and of living in this goodly land because of their faith and their courage to leave home, family, and country to settle in a far away wilderness. Their trials and hardships were but a furnace to refine, purify, and strengthen them. May we have the same faith and courage to overcome our trials and may we also endure faithfully to the end. They are now reunited with loved ones and have found rest from the sorrows and trials of this life. That we may one day join them in a grand reunion should be our constant goal.

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This history was compiled by Donald J. Hepworth from personal histories of many Sant descendants presented at a Sant Family reunion. These family histories were assembled with family group sheets and made into booklet form and distributed to Sant family members by Sadie Sant Fuller and Dessa A. Sant. My thanks to John (Jack) Clifford for loaning me his copy for this compilation. (Donald J. Hepworth)

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This history was typed for computer on August 16, 2006 by Marty Wayne Jensen from a copy of Donald J. Hepworth’s compilation. Included with Donald J. Hepworth’s compilation (but not shown in this document) are three attachments: 1) a drawing of the original Cache Valley settlement, showing the location of George Sant’s cabin in the “fort,” 2) a sketch of Cache Valley towns and settlements, and 3) a copy of a map of the Cheshire England area showing the location of Middlewich and Runcorn.

Marty Wayne Jensen is a descendant of John and Mary Shaw Sant through their daughter Elizabeth Betsy Sant. Elizabeth is one of the two older girls in this history who was married and did not emigrate with her parents John and Mary Sant. Elizabeth emigrated later, possibly with her daughter Mary after the death of Elizabeth’s husband Thomas Winterbottom who died in Manchester, England in 1870.