

History of William Swansea Lewis – as written by child of Joseph Richard Lewis

William Swansea Lewis was born in Nantyglo, Monmouthshire, Wales on January 24, 1835. His parents were William Hopkin Lewis (1792-1866) and Susan Thomas (1792-1863). They (as well as his forbears Hopkin (1764-1837), Benjamin (1734-1795) and John (1705-1748) Lewis) were all natives of Neath Abbey and Neath Valley, Glamorganshire. William Hopkin and his wife Susan moved in 1816 to Nantyglo. There they reared a family of at least two children, a daughter (name and dates unknown) and a son William Swansea who was my grandfather.

William Swansea attended the Nantyglo National (Common) School until the age of 13 when he began work underground in the coal mine. A year later in the autumn of 1849 he and his mother Susan were baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Nantyglo Branch, by Elder James Williams. William was soon ordained a priest and was sent out to preach on the highways which he did “with zeal and success”.

In 1851 he was severely burned by a fire damp.

In 1852 he was made one of the secretaries of the Monmouthshire Conference and was called to travel in the ministry with Elder Thomas D. Giles, a blind man and president of said conference.

In 1853 he was called to the East Glamorgan Conference as secretary to President Dan Jones and ordained an elder in the winter of 1853-54, travelling in the Cardiganshire Conference and “suffering hardships”.

On January 24, 1854, his nineteenth birthday, he arrived in Swansea. At this time he succeeded Elder George G. Bywater as secretary and travelling elder in the West Glamorganshire Conference.

Soon after, he was called to work in the Swansea printing and publishing office with Elder Dan Jones, who published UDGORN SCION – a weekly magazine and also numerous tracts. His duties included translating from English into Welsh for the UDGORN from THE DESERET NEWS, THE MORMON, THE MILLENNIAL STAR, etc. In addition to working at the press and setting type, he did bookkeeping, clerking, and correspondence. “It was a second school and a good one, too”, he records.

On August 6, 1856, he married Rachael Jones (1831 – February 5, 1890). She was born and reared in Swansea, Wales, the daughter of David and Rachael Jones. Her father was “a faithful Latter Day Saint”. Her mother, a Baptist, died of cholera in Swansea in 1848.

In January 1858 William joined the Swansea town police force and served for one year, moving on the next year to service with the Monmouth County police force. Then he served a year each in Breconshire and Cardigan County police forces before settling down to a five year service with the Shropshire Constabulary. During this period in October 1863 he suffered serious injury in a riot which took place at Oakengates. A drunken mob of “navies” who had come into town for the weekend pulled him from his horse and proceeded to gouge out his left eye. For the rest of his long and active life he wore a well matched glass eye and most people were unaware of the difference.

His mother died in November of that year at the age of seventy two. The following year he renewed his covenants with the church at Soudley, Shropshire and became president of the Market Drayton branch until May 1866. At that time he resigned from the Police Force and made plans to immigrate to Utah.

He visited his sister and her family and also his Uncle Hopkin Lewis at Aberdare. Then, in the company of his wife Rachael and her father David Jones, he boarded the ship ARKWRIGHT for the journey across the Atlantic Ocean. While at sea, four days before landing in New York City on July 6, 1866, Rachael's father David Jones died of illness and was buried in the sea.

William and Rachael proceeded by boat to New Haven Connecticut, by rail to Montreal, Canada, thence by the Grand Trunk Railway to Sarnia near Lake Huron, thence across Michigan to Chicago, Illinois and finally to St. Joseph, Missouri. There they took a steamboat up the Missouri River to Wyoming. There, outfitted with ox teams, they left on July 24, 1866 walking across the plains of Nebraska and Wyoming to Salt Lake City, Utah. They arrived there September 30, 1866, describing their condition as "thin and hungry".

William did laboring work – some for Brigham Young – while the fine weather lasted. He described it as "a very fine autumn". In December he began teaching school in Moroni, Sanpete County and continued there until fall of 1868.

He and Rachael received endowments in the Endowment House, Salt Lake City about July 5, 1867 and were sealed to each other.

The following year in December 1868 he took as second wife Sarah Walsh, my grandmother. She was born in Market Drayton, Shropshire, England on December 31, 1849. She was the sixth of eight children born to Joseph Walsh (June 11, 1805 – February 21, 1866) and Mariah Holding (September 15, 1805 – July 7, 1870). They had married about 1832 in Market Drayton.

Sarah had become acquainted with my grandfather through her church attendance in Market Drayton but their paths did not meet again until she, too, had migrated to Utah. Her date and circumstances of her journey are unknown except from family conversations placing it between 1867 and 1868. She was accompanied by family members, probably her brother Oliver Sylvester Walsh (March 23, 1833 – February 8, 1890) and a younger brother Ruben Walsh (?1851-1903) and spoke of a handcart used to carry their belongings across the plains to Salt Lake City.

Sarah bore him nine children during this marriage which William considered a blessing in an otherwise childless double marriage. He maintained two households – Rachael managing a boarding house in Ogden and Sarah having separate quarters, usually following him to his teaching assignments which ranged through several counties around Salt Lake City. He listed these by dates as –

Dec. 1866-68	Moroni, Sanpete County
Dec. 1868-70	North Ogden
Apr. 1870-73	Kaysville
Dec. 1873-74	Brigham City

Apr. 1874-	Malad, Idaho (cut short due to polygamy prosecution)
Autumn 1874	(return to Kaysville)
Summer 1882	Coalville, Summit County
1883-84	Wilson's Lane near Ogden and Peterson, Morgan County
1885-86	Slaterville
1886-87	Kay's Creek, Davis County and Peterson, Morgan County
1888-89	Terrace, Box Elder County

Interspersed with these teaching assignments, William held positions from 1873 through 1879 as City Recorder for Kaysville and Justice of the Peace for city and later as Prosecuting Attorney for Davis County. In 1881-82 he worked as watchman for the Utah Central Railroad and in 1889-93 as Sanitary Inspector for Ogden City.

His beloved wife Rachael died on February 5, 1890. Sarah had had her share of strained dual family relationships during these first twenty one years of her marriage and expressed audible sighs of relief at their coming to an end. Rachael at one point had proposed adopting some of Sarah's six surviving children – all sons – but Sarah turned away this request as unthinkable.

On July 14, 1896 William, who had been at odds with and inactive in the church for ten or eleven years, was re-baptized by Elder William Mayes, re-confirmed by Joseph Hall and was re-ordained a High Priest in Ogden 2nd Ward. His comment gives a hint of reasons for his estrangement from the church – “The harboring of hard feelings is of no good...better to forgive.”

His son Oliver Llewellyn continued the family record at this point describing the severe economic depression of 1894-96. They suffered unemployment, hunger and lack of warm clothing during a prolonged strike by the American Railroad Union. Soldiers were sent from Fort Douglas to guard the trains carrying United States mail.

William, Sarah and their six sons then moved to Baker City, Oregon. Some of the sons, including Oliver, found jobs in the Planing Mill and William became the head bookkeeper in the Oregon Lumber Company. Together they built a home and settled down. Oliver was called to serve on a church mission on May 20, 1898 to the Northwestern States of Idaho, Montana and Oregon. On his return in 1900 Thomas served a similar mission in England. He had an opportunity to visit relative there, returning with news and pictures of them in 1902.

William, feeling that his life might be drawing to its close, with periods of sickness and frailty, expressed his desire to return to the Salt Lake Temple to do work for his dead ancestors. This was accomplished when, with Sarah, he travelled the sixteen hundred miles and returned happy with thoughts of having done temple work for those ancestors who could not do it for themselves.

His final desire was to live to see his fifth son Joseph, who was my father, fulfill a mission to the Eastern United States for which he had been called. Bedridden and ill, William bade his son goodbye and gave him a blessing – “May God bless and prosper you, my son, and may you fill an honorable mission.”

Joseph went on his way learning many days later that his father had died a few hours after their parting on September 26, 1906.