

Abigail Cordelia Burr

22 November 1799 - 27 November 1861

by Elaine Johnson

Abigail was born in Montgomery county, New York. It is a small county about twenty miles northeast of Albany. She was the first daughter born to Horace and Concurrence Hungerford Burr, both of prestigious Connecticut families. Abigail had four older brothers. They were living with her grandfather, Nathaniel Burr, when the 1800 census was taken. Before 1810 her family moved west to Onondaga county which contains the city of Syracuse. Abigail was seventeen years old when she married James Clark Owens. Her first child was born in Onondaga county. Her father's family was still there in 1820.

Abigail's second child was born in Mercer, Mercer, Pennsylvania in 1819. That child, Horace, wrote that his parents moved from there to Trumbull county, Ohio, "before I can remember," probably about 1821. It sounds like a big move from one state to another but it was only twenty miles west. Abigail's son Charles died in 1826 when he was less than a year old. They had moved to Mantua in Portage county by 1828. It is a tiny town twenty miles south of Kirtland. Abigail's son Levi died in 1830. The census shows them living in Nelson township that year.

Abigail and James were living in Nelson township, Portage, Ohio, when they first heard the gospel. Lyman Wight and John Whitmer came to the area in February and baptized her son Horace, among others. Abigail was baptized 20 June 1831. Her parents' family disowned her when they heard what she had done. Less than one year later the Owens family left Ohio and traveled to Jackson county, Missouri. They left the second of May and arrived the fifteenth of June 1832. Her eighth child, James Jr., was born twenty-two days later in Kaw township, Jackson, Missouri. Abigail's eldest child, Cordelia, died later that year. They lived among the Colesville branch on twelve acres above the Big Blue River for a time and moved into Independence the next winter.

James built a large brick home near the printing press. In July 1833 the mob swarmed into the neighborhood and destroyed the press. Two of her children witnessed these events from the scaffolding still on their house. Twice the mob came to her door and twice they left without physically harming Abigail's family. During one riot they didn't leave. When they began forcing the door, Abigail ran out the back to warn the neighbors and bring help. They broke in and James fought them and was badly hurt. All the Saints were driven from Independence, except the Owens family, who were forced to remain. James was a mason and a powerful man in Independence wanted him to complete some work for him. He and others pledged their lives and property that no harm would come to their family.

Once the masonry was completed, James had to hide to keep from being harmed. One night a mob came looking for James when he and their oldest son were away. They began throwing rocks at the house and Abigail bolted the door with a big plank and locked it but they

smashed it. She ran to the cradle to protect the baby. The door fell on her and knocked her unconscious. Eventually James received a note saying they had one week to get out of Independence before they killed him and burned his property. Abigail's family finally left the hate filled city behind.

On March 5, 1835, the Owens family joined the Saints in Liberty, Clay county. James built another home but they had to leave it and flee to Caldwell county. He built in Far West but the trouble began again. In 1839 Governor Boggs issued his Extermination Order. Abigail and her family left Missouri and traveled to Illinois. They met a man on the road who had been attacked by the mob. His head was broken open. He was carrying a small child while his wife led a cow. James put the family in his wagon until another came along with more room.

In spring 1842 Abigail and James moved to a farm four miles below Nauvoo on the Cluff River. The Saints were forced out of Illinois into Iowa in 1846. Abigail and James lived at Mt. Pisgah, Harrison, Iowa, about 50 miles north of Council Bluffs. James had to travel to do his mason work. In January 1847 a man came to the door and told Abigail her husband had gotten lost in the woods and his arms and legs had been frozen. He had died soon after they found him. She gave the man money to get her husband's body and return it to her. He came back without the body saying he had been unable to find the grave. It was located in Decatur county about 140 miles away. Some speculated about foul play.

Abigail's son-in-law, Edward, took his family to Missouri to obtain equipment needed to cross the plains. She went with them. After returning she crossed the plains with her sons Horace and James Jr. Horace was a scout who hunted meat for the company. They left 13 June 1852 and arrived in Salt Lake City the 22nd of September. They went to Provo but moved to Fillmore, the territorial capitol, the next spring. Abigail received her endowments in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City 25 October 1855. The 1856 territorial census places her in Millard county. Abigail lived there with her youngest son until her death. Abigail is buried in Fillmore.

Edward Milo Webb Jr. wrote the following about his grandmother: "Grandmother was the mother of eight children. Two of the children died of exposure while fleeing from the mob during the Missouri drivings. One of the boys was killed by falling under a sled having his head smashed and another one was scalded to death by a kettle of boiling water tipping over on him. Two of the children who survived her, lost their husbands while crossing the plains during the exodus coming to the valleys both being left widows with families of small children. Grandmother died in Fillmore being worn out with the cares and burdens of life. But through all her troubles she was never heard to complain against the providence of God, cheerfully enduring all for the gospel sake. Grandmother possessed the gift of faith and healing to a remarkable extent and her influence for good was felt by all with whom she came in contact. Surely a life of this type brings a testimony to us of her decedents who have not had such trials to bear. Grand mother was small and of a pleasant disposition and was a woman of great faith and integrity." To which Francis Adelbert adds, "Grandmother was a Latter-day Saint through and through. When she was convinced that a thing was right, she did it regardless of the consequences."