

Sketch of the life of Richard Palmer

given by William R. Palmer before The Daughters of the Utah Pioneers

September 1926.

The occasion was the first annual reunion of the Palmer-Middleton families-descendants of Richard Palmer and John Middleton, two of the sturdy pioneers who helped to found the State of Utah.

In the sixteenth century two Englishmen, members of the same family, suffered death because of their vigorous denunciations of the tyranny of autocracy and the inhuman atrocities of the Church of Rome. Those were the days of the holy inquisition when men who dared to think for themselves in matters of government of religion fell at once under the ban of suspicion and heretics were tortured and burned at the stake.

The first of these two men to fall was Sir Thomas Palmer, who was summarily beheaded as an inciter of sedition because he challenged the right of the aristocracy to oppress the masses.

The second was Julius Palmer from Newbury, Birkshire, who was burned at the stake for heresy. Julius Palmer was a scholar-a professor in Oxford University-an independent thinker and a forceful writer. He was a devout adherent of the Church of Rome and believed not the stories of the papal atrocities against the Protestants. As rumors of Protestants sufferings increased, the Professor sent one of his students out to investigate and the man witnessed the burning of a Christian at the stake.

Julius Palmer was convinced that the rumors were true. He then took up a study of the Protestant faith; became a staunch convert to it; and threw himself vigorously into the fight against the papal inquisition. He was soon expelled from Oxford and ere long was in the hands of the Papal Commissioners on trial for heresy.

They led him out to witness the torture and burning of heretics and offered him release if he would recant. When the declaration of absolution was handed for his signature, he took the document, struck out what they had written and interlined a strong denunciation of popish infamy and secular tyranny, signed the paper and handed it back.

He was immediately sentenced to die at the stake in the sand pits of Newbury, in Birkshire.

When the execution took place two other victims were there to share the cruel fate. They were limp and fearful but Julius Palmer was calm and defiant. Chained to the stake and

ready for the torch he scathingly rebuked two priests who came to offer prayers for the souls of the victims. When the fagots were lighted and the flames were licking his flesh he turned to his weaker companions and admonished them to be steady to the end. "Fear not," said he, "those who can only destroy the body, but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Blessed are ye when men shall revile and persecute you for my sake. Our bodies will soon be reduced to ashes but our souls will be in the Kingdom of God where we shall receive pearls instead of coals." Thus he expired.



Several generations later another of the Palmers, Edward, from Newbury, Birkshire, England, went down to Wales in search of employment. There he met and married Margaret James, a Welsh girl from Monmouthshire and settled in Aberaman, now Aberdare. To this couple was born seven children-six sons and one daughter. The second in the family was Richard Palmer the subject of this sketch who was born in Aberaman, South Wales, Great Britain, March 20, 1828. As with his kinsmen of two generations before, Richard's life was destined to be shaped by a new religion and he too was to bear the brand of an heretic.

The family, like the average English working-man's family, were not in opulent circumstances. They were affectionate with each other and happy together, but the scant family treasury

made it necessary for every member to find a job about as early as they were able to work. Accordingly, at the tender young age of about ten years, Richard was sent to work in a foundry some two miles away. His task was cleaning castings but in the two years he worked there he gained a good knowledge of the mounding of metals.

At twelve years of age he was transferred to the Smith shop where during the next eight years he mastered his trade. As an iron worker he had few equals. Throughout his life as a tradesman his work was characterized by its neatness and finish. He could not tolerate a slovenly job.

He also learned the mechanism of the steam boiler and during his last year in Wales drove a steam engine.

Mormonism found him at the age of nineteen and he soon became interested in it. His father belonged to the church of England, while his mother was a devout Wesleyan Methodist. Richard attended both churches and read much of their literature; but while he was of a religious temperament neither creed fully satisfied him. From the first Mormonism interested him but it was not until persecution and revilings were poured out upon the Saints that he was moved to espouse the cause. The blood of the martyrs that was in his veins then flamed up in defense of a persecuted people and in September 1848, at the age of twenty, he accepted baptism. From that time to the day of his death those who knew him will not doubt that he too would have suffered death at the stake before he would deny his faith or recant the testimony he bore of its divinity.

Not long after his baptism a branch of the church was organized and he was chosen first Councilor in the Presidency. He found much joy in building up the Branch but his constant desire was to gather to the body of the church in Utah.

January, 1851, at the age of twenty-one, he set sail for America, arriving at New Orleans April 8, 1851, after a ten-weeks ocean voyage. From there he took passage up the Mississippi River in a steam boat to St. Louis, Missouri.

His money being exhausted, it was imperative that he find a job until he could gather enough means to carry him to Zion.

Three hundred and sixty Saints had crossed the ocean with him. Most of these were still together in St. Louis, and like him, stranded. They were advised by Orson Pratt to remain for a year, and to this end the Apostle organized a branch of the Church. Here again Richard was called to leadership being selected as first Councilor to the President. In this capacity he helped to recruit, to organize and outfit a number of companies of Saints for their journey across the plains.

When finally he had gathered resources to resume his journey to Utah, he took steamer in May 1852, up the Missouri to Independence, where he joined "The St. Louis Company" under command of Captain Marden. Fifty miles out they overtook A.O. Smoot with a large company of Perpetual Emigration Fund Saints and the two companies traveled together to Fort Kearney.

Here they divided, Captain Marden's company leading and arriving in Salt Lake City, September 2, 1852-one day ahead of the Smoot company. The journey was hard on Richard for he was suffering from chills and fever and had walked all the way.

Brigham Young gave Richard his first job in Zion-digging a canal for his grist mill-the same mill that is now enshrined in Liberty Park, Salt Lake City.

The winter of 1852-3 was severe and work was scant. Being an expert blacksmith, Richard finally found more or less steady employment over the Jordan at a place called Jordan Mills. Here he forged for Al Young the irons for the first threshing machine in Iron County, Utah. Young left for the South in the Spring of 1853 owing Richard twenty bushels of wheat for the machine he had built. This debt was finally to be the lodestone that would draw him to the South.

Grasshoppers destroyed most of the crops in Salt Lake Valley in the summer of 1854, and the food outlook was bad. Al Young, at that time living in Old Harmony, sent word to Richard that if he would come to Iron County he could pay off his debt.

About this time Thomas Gower and family who had been called to Iron County, invited Richard to join them and ride in their wagon. At this time he was presiding over the West Jordan Branch, but the authorities released him and advised him to come South, and the Gower invitation was accepted. A friendship was formed between Thomas Gower and Richard Palmer that lasted throughout their lives. They arrived in Cedar City, October 22, 1855.

A set of smith tools was rented from Jonathan Pugmire and Richard set up a shop in one of the Iron Company's buildings. Soon thereafter he bought a set of tools from Richard Benson of Parowan and he and Samuel Pollock formed a smithing partnership which lasted more than a year.

Richard had a few warm friends in Old Harmony who were constantly persuading him to go there-among them Bishop William R. Davis, who was the first man to receive the Gospel in Wales, and John D. Lee. As an inducement to come, they built him a shop and in the spring of 1857, work being slack in Cedar, he took his tools and moved to Old Harmony and was there when the settlement broke up, he coming with Bishop Davis, Elisha Groves, Lorenzo Roundy and others to settle the town of Kanarra.

After a short stay in Kanarra the Church authorities called him back to Cedar City, as the town was without a blacksmith due to the great exodus of settlers that followed the closing down on the Iron Works.

Early in 1860 Richard received a call to fill a mission to Great Britain. He left for his native land in April 1860, being the second missionary ever called out of Parowan Stake.

Arriving in Liverpool, he was assigned to the Welsh Conference and was soon back in his old home. The home coming was a happy one, parents, brothers, and sister giving him a hearty welcome. They had not been able to see the philosophy of his religion but they were tolerant and kind, and admonished him to be honest and sincere in his faith.

On that mission he met Johanna Reese at Pontypool, the Welsh girl whom the fates had decreed should be his life companion. She, with all the members of her family, belong to the church and were early awaiting the time when they could come to Zion. An attachment sprang up at once between them. When he was released it was arranged that she and her sister Martha, would travel with him to the church in Utah. Arriving in Salt Lake City Richard Palmer and Johanna Reese were married in the old Endowment House, October 10, 1863 and from that union has come the Palmers who are assembling here today.

There are those living here in Cedar who remember father's return from his mission. They have told us many times of the splendid reception that was given him and of the beautiful and charming Welsh girl who held modestly to his arm. Her hair was long, abundant and brown, her complexion as fair as a lily, and the twinkle of good humor in her brown eyes won the hearts of everyone.

From her on you know their lives as well as we. They lived in the confidence of the people and it is a source of gratification to us that they live in loving memory in the hearts of all who knew them.

As long as he lived father was an active supporter of all good works. Though retiring in his disposition he held many positions of honor and trust in church and state. He was pensioner of the United States Government for services as a militia man during the Black Hawk Indian War in the Company of Captain Lyman Stevens.

Practically without schooling, through persistent study he became one of the best read men of the country. Scarcely a subject or an author with whom he was not in a general way familiar and he gathered around him one of the best small libraries in the city.

In temperament and tastes he was simple, earnest, and sincere. His home was the rallying place of hospitality and no one, prince or beggar, ever left his door hungry. As far back as my memory goes his Sunday mornings were devoted to visiting the sick of the community. He knew and remembered the birthdays of the children and grandchildren and his little presents never failed.

His faith in God was undoubting and childlike in its simplicity. He talked of death and the hereafter with the pleasant expectancy of a man going on a visit to friends, and the end came as calmly and peacefully as his life had been. He died at Cedar City, Utah, September 16, 1916 at the age of eighty-eight and one half years.