

## JOHN LINFORD

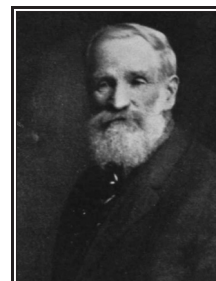
Born: August 28, 1808 England (Died on October 21, 1856)

Age: 48

Willie Handcart Company



Joseph William Linford



Amasa Christian Linford

John left his little town of Graveley, Cambridgeshire, England, where he was born, in April of 1856 with his wife, Maria Bentley Christian (age 43), and sons, George (17), Joseph (14), and Amasa (11). Their oldest son, James (20), did not come with them as he was serving a mission.

John and Maria were married in 1833. They became the parents of six children, one daughter and five boys. Two of their babies died in infancy.

John and Maria attended Methodist meetings at the home of John Fielding, an uncle of Joseph F. Smith who later became the president of the Church. In 1837, John's brother, Joseph Fielding, was serving a mission in England and came to Graveley to visit him. Joseph and the other Elders did not meet with much success, as John Fielding was against them, and they were only able to stay for a few days. They did set up a Sunday meeting, however, which John and Maria and Maria's father, William Christian, attended and were much impressed. William exclaimed, "Why, it is the old gospel come to earth again!"

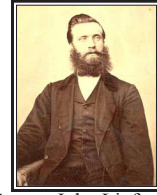
John Fielding died some time later as the result of an accident and Joseph Fielding then returned to Graveley. A man named John Wheeler was the first to be baptized by Elder Fielding. John Wheeler became very enthusiastic about helping spread the gospel. John and Maria were no less excited. They were baptized on December 9, 1842. For a number of years John served as a counselor to John Wheeler in the Graveley Branch presidency. Because John was one of the leaders, he was often the subject of much persecution. Among his persecutors were relatives who were wealthy farmers. They said, "If we cannot persuade him to give up Mormonism we will starve him to it by withholding our work." John's shoemaking business soon suffered so much that he had to let his workmen go. His son, James, said: "During those hard times, Father kept open house for the Elders as usual, and they never knew the straightened circumstances we were in; neither did anyone else. My noble mother stood by my father without a murmur in this hour of trial. It was a dark outlook for a husband and father as financial ruin and starvation stared him in the face. We thanked the Lord for turning away the trial. From the time Father became a member of the Church in 1842 until he emigrated, 1856, he kept open house for the Elders, paid donations to help buy glass for the Nauvoo Temple, contributed to the tithing fund, and also contributed to the support of the local branch. Our house was used for religious meetings, three being held each Sunday."

John began writing a small diary when he left England, where he had served as the President of the Branches of the Church in Graveley, Fenstanton, and Godmanchester. It was a small black leatherbound notebook four and one-half inches long, three inches wide, and one-half inch thick with a metal clasp on one end. Attached to one side of the cover was a long leather loop made to hold a pencil. The diary is now preserved in the archives of the Church. A granddaughter, Donna Linford Putnam, has transcribed the diary. Following are the entries John made beginning April 28, 1856, and then ending abruptly after arriving in America: "1856, April 28th Left Gravely taken train at Offord. Paid 13s.10.1/2d to Peterboro Staid over Night. left for Liverpool Paid 4L.11s.8d Weighted for train at Blisworth Station 3 hours and stoping at every Station We arrived at Liverpool half Past seven secured the Luggage and got to this House About 9 - or ten went to Bed Something after 11. Slept until 5 rose at 6. Wednesday 30/May 1 Went to the office &c. May 2nd Came on board the ship Thornton and secured our births. Saturday was visited by F.D. Richards Gave some Council &c May 4 Launched out with a steady gale Watches set at the hatch way. Sunday received instruction from President Willie &c -- Munday saw 2 Ships following The Saints generally sick. I Myself[,] wife[,] Jos[,] and Amasa some Geo not. Tuesday I am better. Saw four Ships going toward England. Prayer and singing in Each of the wards. Five in number. Thursday Two Deaths an aged woman 75. and a Danish Child. There is a Docter with the Captain to Attend the Sick but he has not much to Do -- the Captain reads over the Corps, but Alows the Elders to Pray over them first &C. Friday rainy the Saints better 13 Hundred Miles from

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James Henry Linford



George John Linford

L-pool. Saturday 10 fine morning a good gale rise at Six bed at Nine Cook by wards. Sunday 11 Held Meetings up Deck, The Captain gives President Willie the previledge of standing up on the Poop Deck that is over the first Cabin -- Munday 12 Good Sailing 12 miles an hour &c . Tuesday Calm Sea, Cleaned our Ward &c Called up Deck to hear Preaching by President Willie. Elder hatwod [Millen Atwood], M. Clough [Moses Cluff] his councilers - Also Elder Chislet - untill it was Diner time. Partook of the sacrament. The Daines Came up to Preach &c. it is strange to hear Men talk so long and then be Ignorant of What they Say. but they have one of their President Can talk English. Elder Willie Addressed them. then their President Interpeted What he said &c. Called in our wards by President Baker for family prayer -- Afterwards went to see the Captain and others his Companions 2 feemails 3 men &c. send up some \_\_\_\_\_ (grand tea) Wednesday 14. Morning Calm and fine Afternoon more gales -- I was called to take Part of this ward to see that they had their water, Pork, Beef, &c. UnExpected to me as i am the same here not Ambisious. you will believe me if i say I did not ask for an office. I am well & All my family. and we Enjoy ourselves first rate -- Tea is now ready the Children run About and Play at Cat after the Mouse or any other thing they Please --"

Early in 1856, John was asked by the local mission leaders if he would let his son, James, become a traveling Elder. John was promised that if his family emigrated that year, James would be released to accompany them. This was agreed to, and James began to labor in the Cambridge Conference in March. Nearly two weeks later, James had a dream that caused him to be sure that he would not journey to America with his family that year. The Linford's soon received notification of their emigration date and the names of their family members that would be going. James was not on the list. James continued serving as a missionary and his family faithfully supported him. James later wrote of this time: "They had made arrangements to emigrate that year not doubting but that I should be released to go with them. It was a great disappointment to all of us. I think I see the hand of the Lord in what occurred, for had I gone with my parents, I might have died on the journey as I was never healthy and strong and undoubtedly could not have stood the hardships suffered by the hand-cart company." On his mission, James supervised the various Branch Presidents, visiting the Saints and their meetings, administering to the sick, collecting the tithing, individual emigration account funds, and money from the Church book agents' accounts. These funds were remitted to the Conference president once a month. James suffered from smallpox and months of severe chills and fever while on his mission, but continued to work faithfully for over four years. He met his future wife, Zillah Crockett, when he was called to go to Liverpool in 1860 to assist with the Church publication, *Millennial Star*.

The Linfords were disappointed but continued with their emigration plans. The entire family worked at farming and other jobs to pay for the upcoming journey. John made enough shoes for the family to last the entire trip and Maria prepared what few things they could take with them. For about 5 pounds they sold a pair of steelyards, a bureau, dining table, peer glass, a set of china, china cups, saucers, and teapot, a buffet, six knives and forks, six rush-bottomed chairs, an oval copper boiler, and a few other items.

The Linfords traveled with the James G. Willie company aboard the ship *Thornton*, and from Iowa City with the Willie handcart company. John was called to be the leader of a group of twenty which shared a tent. He wrote these names and their ages next in his little book. They included his own family, Mary Ann Britin, the Gad[d] family, Maryan and Elizabeth Funnel, Maryann Miller, and Ann Howard. This list was the last entry John made in his diary. He caught cold on the camping ground at Iowa City and gradually grew worse until he could not walk. Maria and her sons had to pull him in their handcart with their bedding and cooking supplies. When the snow began to fall and the cold was intense, John's weakened condition became worse and he succumbed to death. One of John's sons wrote a final entry in his father's diary:

The 19th of October We Mett a snow storm and soon after we mett the brethren from the valey brother wetlock [Cyrus Wheelock] and young [Joseph A. Young] about 270 miles from the valey we had eat up all our flour we have relying upon \_\_\_\_\_ hundred weight of bisket for a week \_\_\_\_\_ people then we came to camp and in the morning we were snowed in and had got all our biskets among us brother willey went to meet the wagons on a mule and father died the 21 October 1856 down by the sweet water river at 5 o'clock in the morning he had been ill from florence first the fever and ague and then weekness and the diareah the jurney was to much for him.

Amasa Linford, who was eleven years old at the time of his father's death, later wrote:

We finally reached camp where some five died the first night; fifteen died the second, among whom was my father, John Linford. Fifteen were put in one grave. While father was sick and just before he died of starvation, Levi Savage emptied his flour sack to make him some skilly as it was called; after eating this he died. [The Linford family and this scene is portrayed in the movie *17 Miracles* by T.C. Christensen.]

Prior to John's death, Maria questioned him about their emigration decision and if he was sorry he had come. His reply was: "No, Maria. I am glad we came. I shall not live to reach Salt Lake, but you and the boys will, and I do not regret all we have gone through if our boys can grow up and raise their families in Zion."

Maria and her sons still had much to face. John was spared the tortuous trek up over Rocky Ridge. Maria said that her teenage son, George, was often the only able-bodied man in their company. The elderly women could hardly be persuaded to cross the cold streams, claiming they would rather die. George often carried them over on his back. One of these may have been 62-year-old Mary Ann Winters Funnell, who shared the Linford's tent. She also survived the trek.

Upon arrival in Salt Lake City, the Linford's were met by an old friend, John Ford, and taken to his home in Centerville to recuperate. George then went to live with a Mr. John Wood and Joseph and Amasa to a Mr. Rawlins. Maria found employment at a home in Centerville but was unhappy there as her boys were not allowed to visit her in the house. In July 1857, Maria married



Maria Bentley  
Christian Linford  
(Rich)

Joseph Rich, the father of LDS Church Apostle Charles C. Rich. He was seventy-one and she was forty-two. Her granddaughter wrote of this event later: Grandmother told me that she worried a lot wondering if she had done the right thing, and what her husband . . . would think about it. Finally, one night she had a dream or vision in which her husband appeared to her and told her not to worry anymore, that it was all right, and he knew she had done it to get a home for her children. After this she felt better. . . . [Joseph Rich] was kind and devoted to her and the boys.

At Maria's grave dedication service in 1885, Apostle George Albert Smith, later President of the Church, remarked: We meet here on this sacred spot to do honor to this dear sister, Maria Bentley Christian Rich. Keep her name in full in your records. She was filled with love, sacrifices, and devotion to family and church and great hardships endured for them. She never lost her faith as long as she lived. She married after reaching the valley in order to have a home for her boys. She was happy to be the wife of Brother Joseph Rich . . . I knew the Rich family and can imagine the love father Joseph Rich had for the Linford boys, which he called his own. This dear sister cared for Brother Joseph Rich as he did for her and the two younger boys. My soul is stirred when I see all these younger generations. Will you live true to the faith of your ancestors? There is royal blood in your veins. Do strive to be worthy of all the sacrifices your ancestors have made for you. Brother James H. Linford Sr. (1836-1925), I knew, and no better man was ever produced." (James Linford stayed in England on his mission until 1861. His picture on page 2 of this sketch was taken in 1860.)

Maria was sealed to John Linford in 1859, with Joseph Rich acting as proxy for John. James completed his mission and emigrated to Utah in 1861. He served in many elected positions in Kaysville and Layton and for thirteen years as the President of Brigham Young College in Logan. He was ordained a Patriarch by Apostle John Taylor in 1903. George married Eliza Wheeler. He served a mission to England in 1864, and in many important positions in his community and as President of the Seventy and the Young Men's MIA. Joseph William married Mary B. Rich, daughter of Charles C. Rich. Joseph helped bring other wagon trains in from Nebraska, served as a county Commissioner, and served a mission to New Zealand. Amasa married Miranda Savage, served as a High Priest, and moved to Bear Lake Valley, Idaho. Maria served as Relief Society President in Paris Idaho. A bowl and saucer and Maria's wedding dress survived the trek across the plains. This treasured heirloom is now on display at the Church History Museum. (See at <https://history.lds.org/article/maria-bentley-christian-linford-wedding-dress?lang=eng>)

Sources: "Diary of John Linford (April 28 to October 30, 1856)," typescript by Donna Linford Putnam, in *Linford Family Heritage*, by Golden C. Linford, 1995; Esshom, Frank, *Pioneers and Prominent Men*; Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website.