

John Toone: A Firm Believer in the Gospel

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John Toone was born April 10, 1813 in Birmingham, Warwickshire, England, the oldest of fourteen children of John and Elizabeth Masters Toone.ⁱ He came of age in the town of Leamington, Warwickshire, where his father was a prominent and successful builder.ⁱⁱ John also learned the builder's trade and "took an active part with his father in the erection of many of the buildings that adorn the parade and chief terraces in Leamington."ⁱⁱⁱ According to family histories, John received an excellent education, including instruction in law, medicine and music. He became an accomplished violist and cellist and was said to have played for Queen Victoria.^{iv}

On June 12, 1836, John Toone married Emma Prosser of Peterchurch, Herefordshire, in All Saints Church, Leamington.^v Both happiness and heartache came quickly to the young couple. Of their first five children born in Leamington between 1838-1846, two of them died very young—Emma, in 1840 at age 2, and Hezekiah in 1847 at age 8 months.^{vi}

In the mid-1840's, John heard the preaching of Mormon missionaries and "was fully convinced of the truth" of their doctrines.^{vii} Even so, because of his strong ties to the Methodist church and perhaps other loyalties, he was "troubled by night and day" about what to do. Finally, after five years of struggle, John came forward and was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Elder Albert Cordon, on April 3, 1849 in Leamington. As he confirmed John, Elder Cordon was "clothed with the Spirit of prophecy and revelation and told him in the name of the Lord that he would be called to do a mighty work in this the last dispensation...that his family would embrace the Gospel and be blest upon the land of Zion." Within just a few weeks of his baptism and confirmation, John was ordained an elder, appointed clerk of the Warwickshire Conference and made president over the Leamington Branch. On July 9, 1849, Elder Cordon also baptized John's wife, Emma^{viii} and in Nov. 1850, over a year after her baptism, she gave birth to another daughter.^{ix}

On Feb 1, 1851, John, Emma and their four surviving children sailed from Liverpool to America on the ship *Ellen Maria*. They had only been on the ocean two weeks when their baby girl became ill, died on board ship at the tender age of 11 weeks, and had to be buried at sea.^x After arriving in New Orleans on April 6, 1851, the Toones eventually made their way to western Iowa where they left in early June of the following year to cross the plains to Utah with the Thomas Howell Company.^{xi} In spite of severe space limitations, John carefully packed his cello in their ox-drawn covered wagon. A member of their company, Thomas Condie, wrote that "on one occasion in Wyoming, the Sioux Indians, painted-up, came into camp. Brother John Toone had a fiddle (cello) and [led the Saints in singing] 'Oh Stop and Tell Me Red Man...' This so charmed the Indians that they departed in peace."^{xii}

After arriving in Salt Lake City in September of 1852, John acquired property in the 20th Ward at 2nd Ave. and D Street and built a comfortable adobe home for his family. He helped to build the Social Hall—one of the earliest musical venues in the city—where he also performed.^{xiii} In Feb. of 1854, Emma gave birth to another son in Salt Lake City.^{xiv}

In the spring of 1854, less than two years after his arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, John Toone was called on his first mission to England where he served as President of the Land's End Conference.^{xv} A touching entry in John's journal near the end of his mission tells of his visit to the graves of his children, Emma and Hezekiah, in the Milverton Church Yard in Leamington. He wrote longingly, "I had some few thoughts, how far their Mother was from them. Shall I see them again? Shall I know them? Something says, 'Yes, you will.'"^{xvi}

In May of 1856, after being released from his mission “on account of ill health,” John sailed home on the ship *Horizon* with a group of saints who would later be known as the Martin Handcart Company.^{xvii} John was made company clerk on board ship and addressed the group several times at meetings along with Captain Edward Martin and other leaders.^{xviii} He also served as a captain for a preliminary company of handcarts led by Jesse Haven that left Iowa City, Iowa about a week or ten days before the larger group.^{xix} When the others joined them later in Florence, Nebraska, John was in attendance at the fateful meeting when the company voted “almost unanimously” to go on in spite of the lateness of the season.^{xx} This decision, along with other factors, exposed the company to unseasonably early Wyoming snowstorms and led to the tragic loss of many lives before their dramatic rescue and late November arrival in Salt Lake City. Given his positions as clerk and captain—and his history of keeping a detailed journal on his mission—it seems almost certain that John Toone would have also kept a journal of his experiences with the ill-fated Martin Company, though such a record has yet to be found.

Life in Utah after the Martin Company tragedy presented new opportunities and challenges for John Toone and his family. On Feb. 1, 1857, he married his second wife, Hannah Wardell, of Hockley Heath, Warwickshire, England and on Feb. 22, 1857, his third wife, Jemima Cook, of Devonport, Devonshire, England, in plural marriage.^{xxi} When federal troops became a threat during the Utah War of 1857-58, the Toone family moved south to Payson, Utah. It was there in 1858 that Hannah passed away after giving birth to premature twins who died, and where Emma gave birth to a baby boy who also died after only two months.^{xxii}

Later in 1858, the family returned to their home in the 20th Ward of Salt Lake City. During this time, between 1858-1871, John’s third wife, Jemima, gave birth to their seven children.^{xxiii} Meanwhile, John continued to play an active role in developing the early cultural and intellectual life of Salt Lake City. He helped with the interior finish work and decoration of the Salt Lake Theater and played cello and viola there in Salt Lake City’s first orchestra.^{xxiv} He was a member the Mineer Band, a popular group that played at dances, weddings and other events along the Wasatch Front.^{xxv} He also built the first 20th Ward schoolhouse on property near his home. A large monument at the corner of D Street and 2nd North in Salt Lake City, still stands as a tribute to John Toone’s efforts.

In April 1869, John was called on a second mission to England where he served as President of the Warwickshire Conference.^{xxvi} This time he was aided in his travels by the newly-completed transcontinental railroad.^{xxvii} In contrast to previous trips that dragged on for many months, John wrote that his 20-day journey to Liverpool in 1869 was “one of the most pleasurable” of his life. “Compare our present journey with our former traveling by oxen and hand-carts,” he continued, “and can’t we thank God and shout Hallelujah!”^{xxviii} He returned to Utah on Oct. 28, 1869.^{xxix}

In the early 1870’s, John moved with his third wife, Jemima, and their seven children, to Croydon, Morgan County, Utah.^{xxx} His first wife, Emma, and two of their children, remained in Salt Lake City and John traveled back and forth regularly to visit them and perform on his cello and viola.^{xxxi} Family and local histories tell of the many roles John Toone played in the early days in Croydon: schoolmaster, music teacher, doctor, lawyer, justice of the peace, clerk, and correspondent to the *Deseret News*.^{xxxii} In 1873, his knowledge of vaccines enabled him to help save lives during a local smallpox epidemic.^{xxxiii}

One of his granddaughters, Dora Toone Brough, fondly remembered John in his later years as “tall with an abundance of curly, snowy white hair and a long white beard. He used a walking stick and his little white dog, Tiny, always accompanied him when he visited at our house. He talked about interesting things, places and people, and sang songs while we smaller children sat and listened intently. He was a grand old man.”^{xxxiv}

John Toone passed away on August 3, 1893, at the age of 80, and was buried in the Croydon Cemetery. He had a large posterity, was “much respected” and died “a firm believer in the gospel.”^{xxxv} His testimony, from a letter written in 1850 after his baptism, continues to inspire: “We know in whom we have believed, that he is able to defend his own whatever powers oppose, and we testify to all around, that we have found the Church and Kingdom of the Living God.”^{xxxvi}

Today, descendants of John Toone still gather on special occasions to revere his memory and hear the hauntingly beautiful strains of “Come, Come, Ye Saints” performed on his antique cello.^{xxxvii} A sensitive portrait of John Toone with his cello by LDS artist Julie Rogers—appropriately entitled “In Tune”—also honors the legacy of this faithful Mormon pioneer.^{xxxviii}

ⁱ John Toone obituary, *Deseret News*, 9 Sept 1893.

ⁱⁱ William Dawkes, *A Short Account of the Late Mr. John Toone*, (Leamington: “Courier” Gen. Printing Works), 1-8.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Toone obituary, *The Bristol Mercury*, Fri. Oct. 6, 1893. <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> accessed 6/3/12.

^{iv} Teresa Dawson Olsen, *John Toone*, (privately printed, 1980), 3. Photocopy in author’s possession.

^v Toone-Prosser marriage, 12 Jun 1836, *Warwickshire, England, Marriages, 1754-1910*, Ancestry.com, accessed 6/13/12.

^{vi} The five children were: Emma b. 1838, Mary Elizabeth b. 1840, William Henry b. 1842, Charles Jabez b. 1844, and Hezekiah Prosser b. 1846. From Toone Family Records (Family Group Sheet) prepared by Irene Toone Erekson.

^{vii} “Mormon” is a nickname sometimes applied to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

^{viii} *The Journals... of Albert Cordon, 1817-1871*. <http://ahlstrom.weebly.com>, 174-79 (Feb 25- Jul 9, 1849), accessed 6/4/12.

^{ix} The daughter’s name was Ann Toone. From Toone Family Records (FGS) prepared by Irene Toone Erekson.

^x “Arrival of the *Ellen Maria* at New Orleans,” *Millennial Star*, 13:13 (July 1, 1851), pp. 200-201.

^{xi} “3rd Company,” *Deseret News* [Weekly], 18 Sep. 1852, 2.

^{xii} Mary Louise Bunker, *Thomas Condie, 1805-1887*. (Gibson Condie Family Org., June 1968). See also Gibson Condie, *Reminiscences and diary, 1865-1910*, 33-35. <http://lds.org/churchhistory/library>, accessed 10/22/10. Photocopy in author’s possession.

^{xiii} Ila Fisher Maughan, *Pioneer Theater in the Desert*. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1961).

^{xiv} The son was John Prosser Toone. From Toone Family Records (FGS) prepared by Irene Toone Erekson.

^{xv} Dorothy Toone Cooke, editor, *John Toone Missionary Journal, 8 May 1854-29 April 1856*. Privately pub., 128 (29 Mar 1856).

^{xvi} Cooke, ed., *John Toone Missionary Journal*, p. 128 (29 Mar 1856).

^{xvii} “A Compilation of General Voyage Notes [about ship *Horizon*],” lib.byu.edu/mormonmigration, accessed 6/6/12.

^{xviii} *Life History of John Jaques*, 8 June, 22 June, 29 June 1856. lib.byu.edu/mormonmigration/voyage, accessed 6/6/12.

^{xix} Josiah Rogerson, “Martin’s Handcart Company, 1856 [No. 2].” *Salt Lake Herald*, 20 Oct. 1868. lds.org/churchhistory/library/, accessed 6/1/12.

^{xx} Josiah Rogerson, “Martin’s Handcart Company, 1856 [No. 3].” *Salt Lake Herald*, 27 Oct. 1868. lds.org/churchhistory/library/, accessed 1 June 2012.

^{xxi} Dora Toone Brough, *John Toone*. (privately pub., August 22, 1953), 3. Photocopy in author’s possession. John’s journal and pioneer rosters also make it clear that both women were converts John knew during his mission in England and both traveled to Utah with the Martin Handcart Company of 1856.

^{xxii} From Toone Family Records (FGS) prepared by Irene Toone Erekson. Photocopy in author’s possession.

^{xxiii} The seven children were: Lyon Lemuel b. 1858, Felix Pico b. 1859, Richard Cook b. 1862, George Benjamin b. 1864, Emma Jemima b. 1865, Caroline Cook b. 1867, Elizabeth b. 1871. Toone Family Records (FGS), prepared by Teresa Dawson Dalton.

^{xxiv} George D. Pyper, *Romance of an Old Playhouse*. Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1928), 154.

^{xxv} “A Musical Reminder of the 60’s,” *Deseret Evening News*, 21 December 1912.

^{xxvi} *Millennial Star*, 31:402 (19 June 1869). Also found in *Deseret News*, 21 July 1869.

^{xxvii} *Deseret News*, 18:116 (6 Apr 1869).

^{xxviii} *Deseret News*, 18: 272 (11 June 1869).

^{xxix} *Deseret News*, 18:456 (29 Oct 1869).

^{xxx} Croydon was originally known as “Lost Creek Settlement.” John’s sons preceded him in moving to Croydon: William Henry and wife in 1865 and Charles Jabez and wife in 1866. From notes of a conversation with Croydon historian, Eric Wilde, 15 June 2012.

^{xxxi} Brough, *Sketch of the Life of Emma Prosser Toone*, 6.

^{xxxii} John Toone is shown as “Justice of the Peace” in John Toone Household, *Croydon, Utah Enumeration District, 1880 U.S. Census*, Ancestry.com, accessed 6/13/12. His writing as correspondent for the *Deseret News* appears mostly in the 1870s. For references to John Toone as clerk and music teacher, see Croydon LDS Ward Sunday School Records (microfilm), Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

^{xxxiii} John Toone, “Local and Other Matters,” *Deseret News*, Thu. Jan 23, 1873 and Wed. June 25, 1873.

^{xxxiv} Brough, *John Toone*, 4.

^{xxxv} John Toone obituary, *Deseret News*, 9 Sept 1893.

^{xxxvi} *Meeting of the Warwickshire Conference, Leamington Spa, Sunday September 1, 1850*, 4. Accessed onsite digitally at the LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, 6/4/12 [CHL, Old Call # P M204.6 W311r 1850].

^{xxxvii} See <http://johntoonecello.blogspot.com> to learn of a 2008 Toone family event and see footage of John Toone’s cello.

^{xxxviii} See <http://tellmystorytoo.com/fincart> to learn more about the John Toone portrait “In Tune” by Julie Rogers.