

**EXCERPTS FROM THE  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES SREEVE PETERSON<sup>1</sup>**

In the fall of this same year [1842], while hauling coal, I met a man who lived near Burlington, who told me of a strange people, whom he had just visited in Illinois. He had become converted to their [the Mormon] faith. His name was Matthew Ivory. His rehearsal of the faith and principles of their church gave me peculiar feelings that I could not

The rehearsal of the faith of this strange people, and the explanation of scriptural passages by Mr. Ivory brought such a flood of light to my mind that I was led to marvel and wonder if this was not the light and He the personage.



*CHARLES SREEVE PETERSON*

throw off my mind. I did not believe in any of the numerous sects, although my parents were members of the Methodist Church, and were, I believe, honest in their convictions; but there was such a difference in the beliefs of the sects in regard to the meaning of the writings in the Bible that I had become almost an infidel, although I had witnessed some strange manifestations.

At two different times, previous to talking with Mr. Ivory while lying on my bed, reflecting in the midnight hours, a light brighter than the noonday sun, burst into my room, encircling a personage who looked me in the face, and passed out of the room, apparently down the stairs, and left the room as dark as dark as a dungeon, for so it was before the light entered as there was a heavy thunderstorm in progress at the time.



*ANN PATTEN PETERSON  
third wife*

By the light and personage in my room I had strange, though pleasing and happy feelings, and they haunted me day and night, and I could not get rid of them. They brought such a flood of light to my mind, passages of scripture came to me, one after another, confirming the doctrines of those strange people, as related by Mr. Ivory.

In a short time I passed Mr. Ivory's again, and he came out from the field and commenced talking again, and said he had some pamphlets he wished me to read. I told him I would be pleased to read them. He said he would have them in the field when I returned with my load of coal. They were

locked in his chest and he dared not let his wife see them or know where they were. She was so bitter against those people, and their doctrines, that she would have burned the pamphlets had she found them. When I returned Mr. Ivory had the pamphlets ready for me. They were headed "The Gospel Reflector" by Benjamin Winchester. I then learned for the first time that this strange and much-hated people were called the Mormons, or Latter-day Saints. I took the pamphlets home and in the evening read while my wife sewed. We were so interested that midnight was upon us before we were aware of it, or scarcely a word had passed between us, and I bear witness that the Holy Spirit bore witness unto our spirits at nearly every sentence I read, that the doctrines and principles contained therein were true and from God, and from that day to the present (26 February, 1889) I have never doubted the truth of the Latter-day work.

... I think it was in December I told Mr. Ivory to send to my house the first Latter-Day Saint elder he saw, and he said there would be an Elder up from Philadelphia, in a few days. Accordingly, in a very few days, he sent Elder Joseph H. Newton to my home, and the additional light he brought to us led me to believe that he was the second light and person represented to me in my room.

I engaged the school house in Sreeveville for him to preach in. He preached two discourses and I told him we were ready and wanted to be baptized and on the first Sunday in February my wife and myself and Thomas Learey, a young man, were baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. In a short time there was a branch of the church organized with forty members, called the Sreeveville branch. I was the only one of my father's family that had joined the church.

Up to this time, I did not have an enemy that I knew of, and was respected by everyone that knew me, as an honest, respectable man with a reasonable amount of intelligence. As soon as it was known, however, that I had been baptized, all turned against me, and I was ridiculed, called a fool and shunned by nearly everyone. My employer, Mr. Powell, called me into his sitting room to talk to me and to persuade me to give up Mormonism. He said it was a delusion. His brother-in-law, Mr. Gardner, assisted him in his efforts. Their families were also present. They told me I must give up my religion, or else promise that I would never talk about it in the presence of their families; otherwise, I would have to give up my position. I told them that to comply with their requests would be to act contrary to my honest convictions, and knowledge of the truth concerning those principles which I had received, and I could not do it.

I know it would be a great sacrifice to me to give up my employment and the comfortable home which I appreciated

so much, but to give up the principles which I had received, and which I knew to be true would be a far greater sacrifice, and of the two I would choose the lesser. I talked to them in plainness and quoted many passages of scripture to sustain me in my conviction of the truths I had embraced, and bore testimony to them of these truths.

I then walked out to the stable, unharnessed the horses, cleaned them and put everything in good order, returned to the house, told him what I had done, and that I was ready for a settlement. From his looks and actions, my determination was a great surprise to him. He did not expect me to act so quickly, and had it not been for his brother-in-law, I think he would have recalled his decision. Gardner thought, however, that I would yield, rather than lose my position, but no position, wealth or earthly honors could move me from my convictions and purposes at that time, as I knew too well the consequences.

I made preparations to move my family to Nauvoo. I worked wherever I could get a chance and sold out what household goods I could not take along. About this time, Brigham Young, George A. Smith, Wm. Smith and others came to our branch, traveling in the interests of the church, and gathering means for the Temple, then being built in Nauvoo. Brigham Young asked me what I had to give towards the Temple. I told him nothing but the labors of my hands. I explained my circumstances to him, that I sold everything I had to get money enough to take me to Nauvoo, and that if I did not go now I should soon not have any, as every means possible was employed by those around me to get my money away from me. He said, "You are a wise man. Many have let their opportunities pass, and are now not able to go, and perhaps never will be."

The evening before we started, a meeting was called, in which we had a joyful time. I was called on to give my farewell talk. While speaking, the Spirit came upon me and I prophesied that inside of a year I would shoulder my gun and stand in defense of the Prophet and the Saints in Nauvoo. (This was fulfilled, just as I predicted.) After I had made the prediction I was afraid and wondered why I had been led to make it. On the 1st of August, 1843, we bade farewell to father and mother, brothers and sisters and to the Saints, and took steamboat at Burlington for Philadelphia, from which place we were transported in canal boats to Johnstown.

... We passed on to Pittsburg and there took steamboat down the Ohio into the Mississippi and up to St. Louis. The apostate, John C. Bennet, was on board, and when he learned we were Mormons he delivered a tirade against Joseph Smith and the Saints. He said the Prophet would take my wife as soon as we arrived. I told him if he had

taken all that had gone there before us, he had enough without taking mine.

We left St. Louis, moved on up the river, and over the rapids, at the head of which lay Nauvoo. We landed at the upper stone house, a little above the main part of the city. I left my family and effects on the bank of the river, walked up to town, inquired for Hyrum Smith, and was directed to his house. I introduced myself to him and told him I wanted to rent a house, and also to get some work, as I had no money to pay house rent, and get provisions for my family. He assisted me in every way possible, and after a little while we were located in a small room and had 5 cents with which to start housekeeping. I found work at William Law's mills, breaking hemp at 1 cent per pound. By hard work I could break 75 to 100 pounds per day. Every tenth day I worked in the quarry, getting out rock for the Temple. I also worked at other jobs, such as splitting oak rails, pulling corn from the stalks, etc.

I finally went to work in the lead mines at Galena, 100 miles above Nauvoo. This work continued until the spring of 1844, when I returned to Nauvoo. I worked for my passage both ways by helping to gather wood for the steamboat.

Soon after arriving home, trouble commenced. The apostates, Higbees and Fosters were stirring up trouble, which resulted in the destruction of the printing press at Nauvoo.

Shortly after this the prediction which I made before leaving Sreeveville was fulfilled, for we were called out to defend the mayor of Nauvoo (the Prophet Joseph) the city council and all the citizens, for all were threatened with death and destruction. We were called out under the name of the Nauvoo Legion, which was organized under the state law, and we were under arms until the martyrdom of the Prophet. With this incident all are familiar from history, but I want to say that the people mourned as I have never seen any people mourn, either before or since. It seemed as if Heaven and all things around us wept and were in mourning. All was silent as death and remained so until Brigham Young and others of the twelve who were absent at the time of the martyrdom, returned, and found Sidney Rigdon putting in his claim to lead the Church, but when Brigham Young stood up and commenced to talk, the spirit of Joseph was visible upon him, and the voice of the Good Shepherd was known to all who had heard him. Thus joy and peace returned to the hearts of the Saints, and all doubt as to the authority and leadership was removed. The work

on the Temple was rushed to completion and we had peace for a short time. During the winter following I made our living by fishing in the Mississippi, giving every tenth day to quarrying rock for the Temple.

On September 12th, 1844, my wife died and left me with four small children. This was a heavy sacrifice to me. She was a faithful wife and mother, and I felt her loss very keenly. Our youngest child was one year and five months old, lacking one day, when she died, and our oldest was only 6 years, 3 months and 23 days old. It left a great amount of labor, care and responsibility upon me, in addition to my daily, or nightly labor, as the fishing had to be done at night. Had it not been for my faith and knowledge of the Gospel, I should have taken the children to their grandmother, but after careful reflection, and seeking council from Brigham Young, I was advised to keep my children by me and go hunt another wife. This I had not thought of.<sup>2</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Copy of the autobiography (typescript) was obtained from Kay L. Cavender, Murray, Utah, who gave her permission for this excerpt to be published. It covers the conversion of Charles and his wife, Ann Dennis, also their early years in the LDS Church. The pictures of Charles Sreeve Peterson and Ann Patten Peterson, also came from Mrs. Cavender. Charles was born July 28, 1818 at Mt. Holly, Burlington, New Jersey to Andrew Peterson and Martha Murdock. At the time he heard of the church, he, Ann, and their three children were living near Sreeveville, New Jersey, where he worked for a Mr. Powell. There he did farm work in the summer and hauled fencing, wood and coal in the winter. For this work he was given a house, rent free, cow feed, and thirteen dollars a month.

2. Charles married Mary Ann Patten in 1845. Together they had three children. In 1849 he married Ann Patten, who bore thirteen children. He emigrated to the Salt Lake Valley in 1849, settled in Mountainville, now Alpine, Utah County in 1852 and with his family, were the first white settlers in Weber Valley, Utah County. In 1870 he married Margaret Crispin, by whom he had two children. His last wife was Mary Thompson, married in 1872, who bore him ten children. In 1878 Charles moved to Fielding, Box Elder, Utah, then in August, 1883, he, his wives and unmarried children moved to Mesa, Arizona. He died there on September 26, 1889.