

THE STONECUTTER AND LUCIUS SCOVIL: "THUS WAS OUR PRAYERS ANSWERED"

William G. Hartley

Late in 1844, one year after LDS convert Charles Lambert of Yorkshire, England, moved to Nauvoo, he proposed marriage to a fifteen-year-old girl who was facing overwhelming problems. Charles was then twenty-nine and working as a stonecutter on the Nauvoo Temple.

When Charles proposed to Mary Alice Cannon, she was both very young and very burdened with major family responsibilities. Mary, born in England, was the daughter of George Cannon and Ann Quayle (and younger sister of George Q. Cannon, who later served in the First Presidency). During the Cannon family's voyage to America in 1842, Mary's mother had died at sea. Mary's father was a carpenter, and in June 1844 he made the coffins for Joseph and Hyrum Smith. A few weeks later, while doing business in St. Louis, he died suddenly of sunstroke and was buried in a grave his family never found. Without warning, young Mary became an orphan who, being the oldest sister in the family, needed to take care of three younger siblings.

Her friend Charles, who had in mind marrying her when she was older, offered to help ease her burden by marrying her immediately to support her and the children. "She had told him that she could not marry him if it meant that she must leave her little sister Leonora," a Cannon family history records; "his prompt reply was, he would do better than that--she could bring along not only little Leonora [about 4], but the boys Angus [about 10] and David [about 6] also, and he would find a home and support them all."

Mary accepted Charles' proposal. Her uncle-by-marriage, Apostle John Taylor, performed their marriage ceremony on November 28, 1844. The newlyweds then tried to provide for the five people in their new family. But, as will be seen, during the first year of marriage the load became too heavy.

WILLIAM G. HARTLEY is an associate professor of history at Brigham Young University, where he writes LDS history full time with the Smith Institute for Church History.

Elsewhere in Nauvoo, Lucius and Lury Scovil, married for fifteen years, were raising a half-dozen children. To help provide income, Lucius opened a "Bakery and Confectionery" on Main Street soon after Christmas, 1843. Customers at the Scovil Bakery bought bread, crackers, cakes, "jelleys and candies of all descriptions," and "marriage

cakes made to order on the shortest notice." (Today the replicated reddish-brick Scovil Bakery is a favorite tourist site in Restored Nauvoo.)

But during the spring of 1844, two things changed for the Scovils. First, on April 15, Lucius sold or leased the bakery to F. H. Mossier. Then, Lucius and Lury's fourteen-year-old son, Joel Franklin



Charles Lambert



Mary Alice Cannon Lambert



*Scovil Bakery reconstruction on the original site of the bakery in Nauvoo, Illinois.
From post card by Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated.*

Scovil, died on May 10th. Such a loss of a promising child prompted LDS poet Eliza R. Snow to pen lines of tribute and publish them in Nauvoo's Times and Seasons newspaper. Her "Reflections at the Funeral of Joel F. Scovil" in part reads:

I had no tears to shed. How could I weep?
His years, indeed, had been few, but then
He was a saint, and has gone to join
The spirits of the just.

...

Soon, very soon
The resurrection morn will dawn and bring
An everlasting triumph o'er the grave.
Be faithful then ye parents! Keep the faith--
Be steadfast in the cause of Zion, till
Your course is finish'd, and your work is done
And you shall soon embrace your child, array'd
In robes of royalty--with glory crown'd
In your own mansion of celestial light.

Lucius and Lury buried Joel in the Nauvoo Cemetery up Parley's Street. Then, in mid- or late-1845, they decided that they should place a headstone on their son's grave. At that point Lucius made what he thought was a simple

business transaction with stonecutter Charles Lambert. In fact, as Charles later recorded the matter, telling the story with marked reverence, the agreement was a sudden and direct answer to his and Mary's urgent prayer behind closed doors in their bedroom, a prayer Scovil probably never knew about. The story circulates to this day among the stonecutter's descendants. Here is how Charles wrote it:

I must mention a circumstance that took place a short time previous to finishing the Temple. I was going home when my wife met me at the door and began crying. Said she could stand anything but this (that was the children crying for bread and she had none to give them). I replied, "why do you not go and ask the Lord to send you some? Why do not you go with me?" We went into our bedroom and fastened ourselves in and there made our request.

In about an hour after, Br. Lucious Scovil came and after some little talk said he would like me to made a grave stone to mark the place where his son was buried. I told him I would do it. He said he was in no hurry but wanted it done. I told him I had a family depending on me. He said he did not have anything to pay with.

But in a while [he] told me he could let me have some wheat if I wished it. I told him I would be pleased to get some. He wished me to go with him and he would let me have it.

I went, got the wheat, 4 or 4-1/2 bushels. I got it, took it to [K]Night's mill, and returned home with the grist.

Thus was our prayers answered.

As agreed, Charles carved the headstone. Into a four-foot-long stone slab he chiseled:

IN MEMORY OF
JOEL F. SON OF
L. N. SCOVIL. DIED
MAY 10TH, 1844
AGED 14 Y 12 D

The stone was then secured upright atop the boy's grave in the cemetery on Nauvoo's east edge.

By way of postscript, a few months after Lucius Scovil made the headstone-for-wheat deal with Charles, Lucius' wife Lury died on January 27, 1846, after giving birth two weeks earlier to twins Martha and Mary. Both twins died, too. Mother and twins were buried in the same grave, and their single headstone stands next to Joel Franklin Scovil's (It is not known if Charles Lambert carved their headstone, too.) Lucius remarried, filled two missions to Great Britain, helped with LDS emigration, and spent most of his life as a farmer in Utah County, Utah, where he died in 1889.

Young Mary Lambert bore her and Charles' own first child on November 5, 1845, in Nauvoo. The family reached Utah in 1849 and settled in Salt Lake City. The Lamberts had a total of fourteen children of their own. Charles cut granite for the Salt Lake Temple and supervised the building of various bridges, canals, dams, and culverts in Utah Territory. He died in 1892, Mary in 1920.

Over the years, the Nauvoo Cemetery fell into disuse and was overrun with weeds, grass, and trees. Headstones suffered deterioration, damage, and theft. A decade ago the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints took over the property, cleaned up the grounds, and fenced the sacred

spot, and it is now a lovely place for tourists to visit. Among the old headstones still standing is that of Joel Franklin Scovil--the remaining two-thirds of it, that is--next to the one for Lury, Martha, and Mary Scovil.

Joel's two-thirds headstone marks more than a burial place, however. For those who know the story, the crafted headstone's carefully chiseled letters serve as a testimonial to one specific and direct answer to prayer that a desperate young Nauvoo couple received in 1845.



*Headstone on the grave of Joel F. Scovil.
Photo of William G. Hartley.*

NOTES

The Joel F. Scovil and Lury, Martha, and Mary Scovil headstones are in the Old Nauvoo Burial Grounds east on Parley's Street.

Information about the Lamberts is drawn from the Charles Lambert Autobiography, LDS Historical Department, Salt Lake City, Utah (we added punctuation in

quotes used here); his life sketch in Andrew Jenson, LDS Biographical Encyclopedia 2:779-780; John Q. Cannon's *George Cannon the Immigrant* (Salt Lake City: John Q. Cannon, 1927); and life sketches of Mary Alice Cannon Lambert and Charles Lambert in Beatrice Cannon Evans and Janeth Russell Cannon, *Cannon Family Historical Treasury* (Salt Lake City: George Cannon Family Association, 1967), 141-152, 153-158. George and Ann Quayle Cannon genealogy data are in Susan Easton Black, comp., *Membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-48* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989).

Lucius Nelson Scovil genealogy data are from Lucius Nelson Scovil and Lury Snow Scovil Family Group Records (submitters: Alonzo Bushman, Sherman Martin Swazey, Nellie M. Durham), LDS Family History Library. The Lucius Scovil Journals 1846-[1847] and [1860]-1861 are on microfilm in the LDS Church Historical Department, Archives Division. Scovil's obituary is in *Journal History*, February 20, 1889, p. 5. A biographical mention is in Frank Esshom, *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah* (Salt Lake City, UT: Pioneers Book Publishing Company, 1913), 1150.

Scovil Bakery notices are in *Times and Seasons* 5 (May 15, 1844), 543, and *Nauvoo Neighbor* (January 3, 1844).

Will it move a feeling of compassion for us, when we tell you, that neither of us have received a word from any of our friends in America since we left there? Surely, can it be that we are forgotten by all? We did every thing, I thought, that we could do, before we left New Bedford, to have the brethren there forward our letters to us, and we have been away nearly a year and a half, and not a word yet; and ship after ship has been here direct from there, and not a word from anybody but Mormon eaters, and they have news enough for us: such as "Joe Smith is dead," and "Daniel Butler has denied the faith, and gone back to new Bedford, and "the church is all broken up and going to the devil." But all the satisfaction such fellows get from me is, that if one-half of the church is shot and the other half have denied the faith, I *know the work is true*, and, by the help of God, I am determined to make all the noise I can about it, and spread the gospel to the ends of the earth, the Lord giving me time and strength to do it. . . .

As you have been on a foreign mission yourself, I presume you know how to feel for us: but I expect all communication was not cut off from you as it has been from us, though you were in a foreign land. I feel very anxious to receive letters from you. . . I feel very anxious to know whether my family are yet in the land of the living; I have not heard a word from them since September 1843. Please tell them they are remembered before the throne of Grace from day to day, and I trust I am not forgotten by them. One of the greatest sources of comfort I have in this my lonely situation, is the assurance that my name is had in remembrance in their prayers from day to day. Tell them to cheer up and be happy in this my protracted stay, and remember that if we are faithful unto the end, the day is at hand when these long separations will be at an end.-- "Though it tarry, it will come."

Addison Pratt (in the Sandwich Islands) to Brigham Young, The Millennial Star Vol. 7 No. 1, January 1, 1846, pp. 14-16.