

The Saint Louis Saints

When the people were being driven from their homes in Nauvoo, my great-grand-parents took refuge in St. Louis, Missouri. This was a good place for the poor Saints because provisions were cheap and the people were very kind to them. John and Ellen Parker, with their large family moved there so they could provide themselves with the equipment and means to cross the Great Plains and join the Saints in Salt Lake Valley.

John Parker Jr., whose wife, Alice Widaker, had died, leaving him with three children, left Lanchshire, England and crossed the Ocean with his three little ones and joined his parents, John and Ellen Parker Sr. in Nauvoo. His parents had come to America in the first ship that was chartered for L. D. S. emigrants.

Ellen Briggs Douglas, with her husband George Douglas and children, emigrated to Nauvoo in March 1842. Just twelve weeks after their arrival, George died leaving her with seven children, the eldest sixteen. The older boys got work and helped Ellen in the support of the family. She did washings and any other work she could get. She had been very intimate with John and Ellen Parker Sr. in England. So when she could, on her trips into the city, she often called to see these old friends. She and John Jr. became better acquainted and decided to join their lives and their families. They were married in 1846 by Samuel W. Richards and received their endowments in the Nauvoo Temple. There were now ten children in the family with six under ten years of age. The Saints were preparing to leave their homes in Nauvoo and move west. John and Ellen Parker didn't have the means to make that great move at this time. Nor did they have the means to take all the family to St. Louis. So John and Ellen, with Ellen's daughter Ann, went down. This left Isabell, who was not yet twelve, to look after her grandfather, John Parker Sr., who was very feeble. Grandmother Parker had died previous to this time. Isabell also had the six younger children to look after as well as all the other work. She baked and did all the cooking by the fireplace.

John, Ellen and daughter Ann all got employment in St. Louis and as soon as they earned sufficient Ellen went back to Nauvoo and brought the rest of the family. Then all of the children that were old enough, got work and all the family worked and saved towards a common goal__that of joining the Saints in their westward trek to the valleys of the mountains. Ellen did housecleaning and washed clothes for "six bits" a day. John had suffered with chills for thirteen months, chilling every day. Now he was better but still very weak when he arrived in St. Louis. He applied for and got a job in a root beer factory which paid him only seventy-five cents a day. Provisions were very cheap in St. Louis at this time and the climate agreed with them so their health improved and they soon made a pretty good living.

John Parker stayed at the same place a year and a-half, learning the business by observation in his own quiet way. Then he and a man by the name of John Carns went into the soda water, root beer and summer drinks business in the year 1848. They were very prosperous and employed over a hundred men.

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My Grandmother Alice Parker Isom who was the first child of this marriage was born Jan. 8, 1848 in St. Louis and her brother John was born Nov. 1, 1851 just a while before they left that place. My Grandmother remembered very little of her early life in St. Louis but this much she told me and I suppose it was told to her because she was only a little over four years when they came to Utah: Her father owned a root beer factory and although she was but a tiny tot she often wandered to the factory and sang for a bottle of soda water. This was the beginning of a long career of singing. Though she never made a real career of singing, all her life long she sang, in Church and all public gatherings, in groups and in the home. On her seventieth birthday she danced and sang for the entertainment of family and friends. Her memories of the trip across the Plains were mainly ones of happiness, for they traveled in comparative comfort. The carriage or spring wagon in which she rode was arranged so

that the occupants could lie down or sit up as they chose. Of course her parents, grandfather and baby brother also rode with her in this wagon which was drawn by a big team of horses. There were eleven other wagons in the company, all drawn by oxen, in which rode other members of the family and relatives. John Parker Jr. was the president of this company. It was a merry band that started out on that long trip to Utah in the spring of 1852. They had milk and butter all along the way. The cows were milked night and morning and the milk was strained into a kit which was set in one of the wagons. The jolt of the wagon churned the butter.

On the 28th of August 1852 the company arrived in Salt Lake Valley and located on second South between East and West Temple where the Cullen Hotel now stands. John Parker built a two roomed adobe house, forty by twenty feet, with a lumber roof. This house was furnished very sparingly but contained a small cook stove, one good walnut leaf table which had been converted into a packing box during the trip across the Plains, as well as plenty of dishes, beds and bedding. It was not long before they had "turned posted and corded" bedsteads and rush bottomed chairs made by John and Thomas Cotton. This home was one of thrift, industry, peace and love.

Note: Most of the above information was taken from the "Life of My Father, John Parker" from memory by Alice Parker Isom, my grandmother and sent in to the D. U. P. a few years back by myself, Ammie Isom Matheson.

The Memoirs of Alice Parker Isom published in the Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 10 contains information concerning her practising as a midwife.