

JACOB JOSEPH SMITH FAMILY HISTORY

By his Daughter - La Verda Smith Allen



Jacob Joseph Smith and wife, Anna May Stratton

Jacob Joseph Smith was born 15 December 1867 in Manti, Utah. He was an illegitimate child. His mother was the sixteen year old daughter of Peter Larsen and his father Joseph Albert Smith. When his mother, Anna Marie Larsen was eighteen years of age she became the third wife of Archibald Waller Overton Buchanan. They moved to Glenwood, Utah leaving Jacob with his grandparents until he was 14 years old.

His childhood was not a happy one. He was frequently taunted by his school mates regarding the circumstances of his birth, which often resulted in fights. Jacob was a strong lad and after a few scuffles his playmates began to respect him. His grandfather, though not unkind, was a stern man often asking tasks of Jacob beyond his maturity.

It was from his grandmother that he received the love and affection he needed. It was she who saw that he had a few pennies to spend and who prevailed until his grandfather consented to buy him a pair of "store bought" shoes to replace the wooden ones he wore. All through his life whenever he spoke of her he did so with deep love and affection.

But it was through his grandfather that he learned to work and to do a task well. His grandfather was a stone mason and Jacob "tended" him in his work, finally learning the trade himself. Jacob recalls the time that Brigham Young came to Manti to dedicate the ground for the Temple, and he along with his grandfather and uncles worked on the Temple foundation. When he was fourteen years of age, his mother sent for him to come live with her. From this time on his life became a happier one. He still had to work hard, being the eldest of her family

of four children (two more were born later). He spent many hours out on the range herding sheep. He also drove a freight wagon for the Dover Reef Mine while still in his "teens". He accompanied Archibald Buchanan on his many trips among the Indians and was called "Unca Kibe's papoose" for years afterward. When he reached adulthood, he stood over six feet tall and was strong and agile. He often excelled in feats of strength and skill with his companions.

The community of Glenwood organized a theater group and Jacob was cast as the male lead. His leading lady was small, vivacious Anna May Stratton who was visiting her sister. They were attracted to each other and were married in a civil ceremony in 1888. A year later they traveled to Manti and were married in the Temple.

Anna May Stratton was born 5 January, 1867 in Virgin City, Utah. She was the tenth of eleven children of Oliver Stratton and Harriet Ann Brown Stratton.

Oliver and Harriet were among the few families called by the Prophet to leave their homes and friends in Draper, Utah and move to Southern Utah to settle and establish the Church there. It was a dry, arid land and it required the efforts of young and old to make the land produce.

Anna May's childhood was not a happy one either. Her mother died when she was three years old and her father when she was eight. Her oldest brother, James Albert and his wife Emily assumed the task of raising the orphaned children. This, however, did not prove successful and one by one the older children left home to fend for themselves.

When Anna May was fourteen, her oldest sister Melissa, whom she had never met, came down from Glenwood, Utah, for a visit. When she saw how hard Anna May's life was, she asked James if she could take her back to Glenwood, and he gave his consent. From that day on her life became a happy one. She and her niece Molly, who was only a few months younger, became inseparable.

Even though Powell Johnson, Melissa's husband, was considered "well fixed" in those days, Anna May supported herself. She became an excellent seamstress and a very good cook.

In appearances she was not considered beautiful. She was slight in stature, five feet, one inch tall, and weighed between 90 and 100 pounds all her adult life. Anna May's beauty was in her loving, generous and friendly spirit. Her hair was light brown and her eyes deep violet blue that sparkled. She loved to dance and at age eighty she could still polka.

Anna May met and married Jacob Joseph Smith in a civil ceremony 4 December 1888 and later in the Manti Temple, 23 October 1889. He was to remain her partner for 70 years. This partnership ended by his death 2 March 1958. They had five sons born to them in Utah. They were: Wayne, Vern, Earl, Arthur, and Floyd.

Anna May had many interesting experiences with the Indians. Jacob operated grist mills in Escalante, Loa and Elsinore. The Indians would come to the mills to trade and sometimes they would stay for days. Jacob was well respected by the Indians as "the honest white man" and as a giant in strength as the Indians would get together to show feats of strength and prowess. Anna May taught many of the Indian women to make bread and she also taught them to make other things.

With such a large family, mostly boys, Anna May had a very hard life. There were no conveniences those days, especially on isolated farms, which could make life easier. All the heavy work clothes had to be washed on a wash board. However, the third son, Earl, was her best helper. He learned to cook, scrub floors and he helped her with much of the heavy wash.

Anna, being so small and frail, did not shrink from work. Her home was always spotless. She was an excellent cook, and she made ordinary food taste delicious. No one ever remembers her sitting idly. Whenever she had a few minutes to rest she had her knitting handy and would immediately pick it up. She never turned a needy person away from her home. She was called on often to help nurse the sick and she often prepared the dead for burial. She was generous in the full meaning of the word. Anyone visiting her home had to be fed and often left with a handmade article or food.

She had a strong faith in prayer and she often said that she could not have raised her family without the help of her Heavenly Father.

Five sons were born to them during these years; Wayne, Vern, Earl, Arthur, and Floyd. These sons recall with fondness the evenings they listened to their parents sing with Anna accompanying on the guitar.

Wayne Elry Smith was born 13 November 1890 at Glenwood, Utah. He was the first son. He was born prematurely and weighed but four and one-half pounds. Anna May carried him around on a pillow the first month or so of his life because he was so small. But by the time he was a year old he was a normal, plump child.

Wayne had a love for learning and was a good, but his great love was music. He had been blessed with a lovely voice and took every opportunity to improve it.

A friend of Jacobs had returned from Idaho with news of opportunities for stone masons and other construction craftsmen and Jacob decided to move his family there. They settled in Sugar City around 1903 or 1904 and he worked as a stone setter on the Beet Sugar Factory and later on the Court House in St. Anthony. From there he went to work on the Ricks Academy at Rexburg doing much of the fancy cornice work on those buildings. Two more children were born in Sugar City, the only girl, LaVerda, and another son, Elden.

In Sugar City Wayne continued his schooling and was able to take piano lessons for the first time. He became organist for the Sunday School at an early age.

It was when he was sixteen years old that tragedy struck. A small group of his friends were going rabbit hunting out in the country and stopped by to ask Wayne to go along. Our parents were very resistant to let him go, but with the coaxing of the boys they finally gave their consent, and they all left in good spirits. They had to walk quite some distance and later in the morning they came to a barbed-wire fence. They took turns holding the wires apart for the nest boy to crawl through. As one boy did so, the trigger on his gun caught on a bush and fired. The bullet hit Wayne in the right side at a close range, shattering his arm. The boys were panic-stricken and one boy ran for help. It was some time before help came. The boys wrapped their jackets around his arm trying to stop the bleeding. The doctor in Sugar City knew that he was not equipped or able to handle this emergency and suggested the family take him to the L.D.S. Hospital in Salt Lake City. Anna May was seven months pregnant with her seventh child and Jacob insisted he go with Wayne. They had to travel by train and by the time they arrived at the hospital, blood poisoning had set in and in order to save his life they had to amputate his arm a few inches below the shoulder. Due to loss of so much blood, the blood poisoning and shock, Wayne's life hung in the balance for over a week. He was unconscious all this time and Jacob stayed with him night and day. When he finally became conscious and Jacob gave him the sad news they both wept. Only once again after that was he to shed tears for his loss. When he arrived back home after several weeks in the hospital, a group of his friends came to see him, and one boy, not realizing his mistake, asked Wayne to play the piano for them, and Wayne again wept.

Wayne never let the loss of his arm stand in his way in achieving his goals. He had great courage and religious faith and met each obstacle as a challenge. He became an excellent penman with his left hand, learned to tie his own shoe laces and ties, and never once complained. He was patient and slow to anger and acted as a peacemaker when differences arose among the boys.

I, LaVerda, was the only girl born in this family of boys and was 2 and one-half years old when Wayne's accident occurred. All my memories of him are pleasant ones. He was my idol and my champion. I was a willful, spoiled child, being the only girl, and Wayne could always manage me and made me behave better than anyone.

In 1914 Wayne the eldest son, applied for 360 acres of farm land under the Homestead Act anyone applying for land must start working and building right away. He built a one-room log cabin all by himself which was indeed a great achievement for a one-armed man (When I visited the old homestead in 1965 this log cabin was still standing, though all other buildings on the farm had been torn down) This farm was situated at Lamont, Idaho. Because Wayne needed help to build and work the land, he and his father became partners. The older boys all helped on the farm and Jacob accepted other jobs to buy stock and machinery. He started work for a steel construction company named Perham and Harris and served as foreman on construction on rail-road bridges over the Snake River and one near Boise, Idaho. At the outbreak of World War I, two sons, Arthur and Floyd, entered military service putting a heavy burden of work on those remaining at home.

In the spring at crop planting time my mother would send me to the field to tell the men it was upper time. I would climb up on the plow, or harrow, whichever implement Wayne was driving. I would hold on to his belt to keep from falling and ride the last round or two before quitting time. Then he would lift me onto the back of one of the horses to ride back.

We always had musical instruments in our home: a piano, mandolin, coronet, and violin. Our evenings were spent all together, eating popcorn, singing and playing our musical instruments, and sometimes studying. Wayne learned to accompany himself on the piano. He would sing the melody and play the base chords with his left hand. His favorite composer was Carrie Jacobs Bond and a few of his favorite songs were "Just A-wearying for You", ~Mighty Like a Rose", and "The End of a Perfect Day>" He never refused when asked to sing at funerals, weddings, and celebrations.

Wayne was courting a girl from a neighboring farm by the name of Clarice Callow. There was to be a dance and entertainment at Lamont and Wayne asked our mother if he could take me with him on his date. She dressed me in my best dress and slippers and curled my hair. I was so thrilled to be going with him but I can't recall any of the events of the evening except becoming so very sleepy.

I don't know the events leading up to his meeting and falling in love with Ivie Thompson and their eventual marriage on 6 July 1918, but the family was all so pleased and happy for them both.

This was the year (1918) that the dreaded influenza epidemic swept the nation. Ivie had gone down to St. Anthony to visit her parents and Wayne decided he would go by horse and buggy to bring her home rather than have her risking exposure to the dreaded disease by coming by train. When he arrived there Ivie was already ill and he stayed to help nurse her. She was already pregnant and this added to the seriousness of her condition. However, she survived, but Wayne was stricken. Our mother went to help nurse him as all in the household were either sick with the disease or just recuperating. He became critically ill and though' he fought with all his strength to live, he finally succumbed on the 24th of November 1918.

I remember the day of his funeral very well for his passing left me bereft of a loving brother and friend. All public gatherings had been banned so the funeral was held out-of-doors. It was in the dead of winter with deep snow covering the ground. His casket was placed just outside the bay window of the living room. Ivie and my parents sat inside and the window was opened enough for them to hear the service. My younger brother, Eldon, and I had to stand back by the gate, away from anyone.

What a great void his death made in our lives. Our mother lost her first-born and had two sons, Floyd and Arthur, serving in the Army of the First World War. Ivie lost her sweetheart, husband of four months, and father of her unborn child. (When the child, a daughter was born on May 6, 1919, she was named Wayne, after her father.)

He was a man of strong moral integrity and possessed deep religious beliefs and an honest character. He loved life, and though he had many obstacles to overcome, he was a happy man.

Vern Overton Smith was born 9 February 1892 in Glenwood, Utah. There was only 14 months difference in age between Vern and Wayne. Their coloring and height were identical, so much so that people often mistook them for twins. Wayne was a rather serious child, but Vern was full of life and was a natural mimic. He would keep them all laughing with his antics.

When Vern was quite young, a diphtheria epidemic swept through their town. Nearly every home was stricken with tragedy. Wayne and Vern were stricken, and although Wayne recovered fairly well, Vern was seriously ill. One night Anna May sat by his bed and watched him struggling for breath. His lips were turning blue for want of oxygen and she knew he was going to die. She knelt down and cried to the Lord to help her know what to do for him. Without any hesitation, she wrapped a clean cloth around her fingers and, inserting them far back in his throat, began pulling out the mucus and membrane that was choking him. All through the night she repeated this cleansing, and by morning his color and breathing was better.

Our mother taught the boys to recite poems and to sing. They were often asked to perform at the different social evenings the community planned. One such evening she made them up in black face, Vern as a black girl with colored rags in his hair and Wayne as a black boy. They sang "My Cole Black Baby" and were so heartily received that they answered many encores.

When Vern was eleven years old, the family, which had now grown to five boys, moved to Idaho. They settled in Sugar City and Vern attended school there. He got a job as delivery boy for Sugar City Mercantile Store and as he grew older he worked in the Sugar Factory. It was here that I (La Verda) was born in 1905 and two years later our brother, Bud (Eldon).

In 1910 or 1911 we moved to a farm in Farnum, Idaho. We had a two-story farm house which gave our large family more room. Vern and his younger brother, Earl, began courting Mable and Minnie Peterson. Their father was a very strict man and opposed the boys' attention to his daughters. Earl soon lost interest, but Vern persisted in courting Minnie, and on December 31, 1913 they slipped away and were married. I recall the night they came home to the farm after the wedding. Mother hustled us out of our room and into make-shift beds so the young marries could have a room to themselves.

A year or so later we moved to a farm at Lamont, Idaho. Vern and Minnie came often to help us with planting or harvesting. Vern loved animals and was very good in handling them. He followed the large herds of sheep that came through our area on the way to higher pasture. He would pick up the new-born lambs that were too weak to follow the herd and were left to be prey to wild animals. We soon had a small herd of our own.

Vern worked at different jobs in the building trade. He learned to be a stone mason from our father who had received his training from his Danish grandfather, Hans Peter Larsen. Vern and Minnie bought a small home in St. Anthony.

Two children were born to them: Arthur Gale on 24 November 1914 and Nyla May on 11 February 1918. The year of 1918 was a tragic time for our family. The influenza epidemic swept through the country and hardly a family escaped the deadly illness. Wayne became ill and died 24 November 1918. He was survived by his bride of four months. Vern and his little family were stricken shortly after. As nearly every family had illness, it was very difficult to find someone to come in and nurse the sick. Our mother went down from the farm to take care of them, leaving the remainder of the family to care for themselves. Our father caught the "flu", as it was commonly called, and was seriously ill in the hospital in St. Anthony. Vern passed away just six weeks after our brother, Wayne. These were such dark days for our family. Two of my brothers, Arthur and Floyd, were in the service of the First World War and two dead from the influenza.

Vern Overton Smith's stay in mortal life was a short one. However, he left his mark on all our lives. He was a loving son, brother, husband, and father, and an honorable, upright man. We all grieve for the companionship and love we have missed by his death and can only hope we can be found worthy to renew our relationship in the world to come.

Leo Earl, known as Earl, was born at Escalante, Utah on 23 January 1894. Many of his early memories were of playing with Navajo and Paiute Indian children. When Earl was nine years old, the family moved to Sugar City where he joined athletics and acted as "bat-boy". Gradually he was taught to play other positions on the baseball team and became star pitcher on many local ball teams. He used to get double pay for pitching.

While he was at Farnum, Idaho he met Naomi Green. Her father, Silas and mother, Laura Caroline Gibbons Green had a family mercantile store and a small farm on the side. Naomi also acted as substitute teacher because she was "well educated," having been an "A" student and having gone through one year of high school. Their romance started slowly, but Earl "knew that he would marry no other girl," so finally he married her on 4 December 1913. Three children were born to them: Merlin in 1915, Elon in 1917, and Cleo Mae in 1920.

For 13 years the family lived on a farm of 240 acres 1 mile west of the small two-room school house at Lamont, Idaho. Earl often went to the surrounding areas to build houses or lay stone for bridges. When there was a poor price for wheat or poor work chances in the area, Earl would spend the winter in California working at the plastering trade with Jake and his brothers. Sometimes his family would go with and at other times the family had to remain in Lamont to care for the farm animals. They missed him but realized that this was how things were for poor people. Earl was energetic and an excellent tradesman at several trades, but even for the best workers, the Great Depression was a time of trial. But, with their farm, they always had a good place to sleep and plenty of food to eat, which was not true for most Americans.

Earl was a very good husband and father for a close-knit family who would always stand by other members of the family "right or wrong" and help each other with problems. Honestly and integrity were expected as a matter of course and the family seemed to believe that "there never was a lazy Smith." For all the years until her death at age 42 the family never heard Earl speak a sharp or cutting word to his wife, Naomi, because he "was so thankful for her that he promised God that he would treat her like a queen."

He was the best of fathers; cheerful, singing as he worked, playing a ukulele and often slipping in a bit of dry humor or playing games at conversations. He was the envy of the other children of the neighborhood because he could make the best bows, the straightest arrows, and could even flake a bit of obsidian into a crude arrowhead. He knew how to snare rabbits, catch grouse or fish with his bare hands, make willow-whistles, quill pens, duck-down pillows, skin a weasel, or an elk, and a hundred other Indian skills useful on a semi-frontier. He expected, and got respectful discipline without harshness. His methods were simple and direct: if he was working on the car he simply drew a line on the ground which the boys were not to cross to bother him...that line was better than a ten-foot fence because the controls developed were from within the heart instead.

He loved people.

Wayne had been married just four months, and Vern was married with two small children. As there had never been and "legal" partnership established, all Wayne's properties were awarded to the widow, leaving Jacob penniless at the age of fifty-one.

This was such a staggering blow that Jacob fell into a period of despair and depression that lasted for almost three years. In 1922 he decided to go to Los Angeles, California and try his luck in finding employment, and also, peace of mind. He obtained work as foreman with Janz Investment Company Developers. Los Angeles was entering into a building boom and he sent for Earl and Floyd. They formed a plastering company known as Smith Brothers and were comparatively successful.

When Jacob retired, his sons built a home in the San Fernando Valley for him and Anna. In coming to California Jacob not only found the answer to his financial problems, but he came to a decision regarding his membership in the Church. He had fallen into careless ways (Grandma, Ila Smith, said he was smoking tobacco), through his adversities and he began to "put his house in order". The grief over his son's death and the loss of property brought him to the realization that he must put his greatest efforts to spiritual improvements.

He was ordained a High Priest in Wilshire Ward Los Angeles Stake. When they moved to Sherman Oaks in San Fernando Valley, he became very active with the adult Aaronic Group, and was instrumental in bringing many men back into active duty in the Church. Jacob and Anna was known "grandpa and grandma" throughout the Stake and were loved and respected by both young and old. Jacob never refused when called to administer to the sick despite his

advanced years.

His health remained very good until his 90th year when he was stricken with cancer. He died 4 March 1958.

These lines written about Jacob do not in the smallest degree describe the wonderful man he was. He overcame hardship, grief, and despair to establish himself as an active member in the Church, and to find inner peace.

I, his only daughter, found safety and comfort in his arms as a child, and felt his understanding and love throughout my life. He never made a great name for himself or acquired any wealth, but he, in my eyes, was a successful man.