

Tribute to  
**Jeremiah Leavitt II**

by

Jolene Passey

Bonaparte Cemetery, Bonaparte, Iowa

Thursday, September 18, 2003

Today, here in Bonaparte Cemetery in Bonaparte, Van Buren County, Iowa, we honor and pay tribute to Jeremiah Leavitt II, born 30 May 1797 in Grantham, Chesire, New Hampshire, the son of Jeremiah I and Sarah Shannon.

You will probably place him easiest in the list of Jeremiah's by knowing that the one we speak of was the husband of Sarah Sturtevant – whom he married when he was 20.

The general story you have heard many times this week – the life in Hatley, the missionaries and the exodus from Canada to join with the Saints in Kirtland. And it was there in Kirtland that Jeremiah was baptized by Hazen Aldrich in 1837. At 12 mile grove, he was ordained a Teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood by King Follett. In Nauvoo he received the Melchezidek Priesthood and was attached to the 16<sup>th</sup> Quorum of 70's. And it was also in Nauvoo as Jeremiah and his family prepared to leave that he and Sarah received their endowments on 2 Feb 1846 – 157 years ago.

As I began to prepare for today, I became keenly aware that you can't pay tribute to someone you don't know. Yes, I knew the stories but I wanted to know the man. And so I would like to share with you a few things about the Jeremiah I've come to know. He left a few lines about himself that are quite revealing and then we have what Sarah, his wife recorded.

The first thing I would like to mention is that he was a hard worker. From clearing land in Hatley for \$10-\$15 an acre to the three homes he built for his family after leaving Hatley. In addition there was a home to be built at the Big Mound using those bricks he and his sons had made.

Sarah provides us the insight on his responsible nature as head of a burgeoning household:

1. While working his team in Mayfield. Ohio, she writes, "we got plenty to live upon." And, "My husband had not only provided for his family but had got considerable besides."
2. Near Joliet, Illinois, Jeremiah worked his team on a canal project for \$3/day and Sarah reports, "we moved out there and I washed for the work men and we got a good living."
3. At 12 Mile Grove, Illinois, "we raised a great crop and had a fine living."
4. And near Nauvoo, "we had to work hard for a living."

Jeremiah demonstrated honesty and integrity. Once at his farm outside of Nauvoo, Jeremiah had planted wheat and when a survey was conducted part of his wheat field lay on the neighbor's land. When it came time to harvest the wheat Jeremiah's neighbor refused to allow him access. Jeremiah sought counsel from the Prophet Joseph who directed him to let the neighbor have the wheat and not contend for it. Jeremiah followed Joseph's advice and walked away.

Besides "believing without any preaching," faith was not far from this man's actions. Until Nauvoo, they had not actually lived where there had been a branch of the church, but they got together every week and had prayers. And back to all that hard work, their recognition of the Lord's hand is evident as Sarah writes, "but with the blessings of God and our exertions we soon

began to get a good living.” After the death of the Prophet Joseph, Brigham Young spoke to the Saints and many reported a similar experience to the one Jeremiah reported - Brigham had spoken with the same voice and Spirit as Joseph. And finally about his faith we read in his wife’s journal, “my husband was praying...he prayed that we might be counted worthy to partake of the Tree of Life and enter in through the gates into the city of the New Jerusalem.” There is record of his paying tithing on 11 ½ bushels of corn @ 16 2/3 cents per bushel for a total donation of \$1.92. Truly he had spiritual depth and lead his family as their Priesthood leader.

He respected and loved his wife Sarah. He believed her when she woke him in the night as they were fleeing Nauvoo and said they must leave or be killed. He listened to her – she felt comfortable sharing her answer to prayers she had concerning polygamy. He took care of her when she was ill. He watched through the nights at 5 Mile Grove until she was well. At Nauvoo he could not collect on a debt to buy tea for her in her illness and was refused credit at the store. He left his ax for collateral and bought the items she could not do without. He loved her and she loved him, Sarah writes that she had been a true wife and, “you know how much I love him.” While living at the Big Mound the men took turns watching at night for danger. When it was Jeremiah’s turn to watch, Sarah went with him. She made him tea was worried about his poor health. They worked as a team.

We know that he was a kind person. He never struck his animals and unyoked them whenever possible for rest. Sarah said, “I want to say that he was very kind to his cattle and children, especially his two little girls – he almost worshipped them. He said he wanted to live to see the girls married and settled down in peace.”

Once Sarah had sewn dresses for the little girls. Betsey was to stitch something and did it in a way that provoked Sarah (by her own admission) and she scolded Betsey. Jeremiah said, “Come here Betsey and let me see your sewing. If it is done good your mother shall not whip you.” He looked at the sewing very careful, he says, “it is sewed just as good as Mother would have sewed it.” He thought everything they did good – why I mention this is to let you know how indulgent he was to his children.

Yes, he loved his family – all of his family. Remember it was he and Sarah who had stopped at White Pigeon and found and rescued Nathanel’s three orphaned children.

After being driven from Nauvoo they arrived at Mt. Pisgah. Here Jeremiah determined to go to Bonaparte, Iowa to help his son Jeremiah III and family to reunite with the main group and to get flour for the winter. Not long after Jeremiah left with his son Dudley for Bonaparte, the whole camp at Mt. Pisgah became sick with ague. Sarah and others were very ill. Up in Bonaparte, Jeremiah had become sick too. On the 4 Aug 1846, Jeremiah lay dying. From Sarah’s own hand we read, “my husband died the 4<sup>th</sup> of Aug 1846...he had but two children married, Louisa and Jeremiah and one grandchild, Jeremiah’s daughter Clarissa. He sang come Let us Anew our journey pursue roll round with the year and never stand still till the Master appear. He sang that hymn as long as he had strength to sing and then wanted Elisa to sing it. He died without a struggle or groan. Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, yea saith the Spirit for they rest from their labors and their works do follow them.”

Jeremiah and Sarah had left Hatley nine years earlier with 8 of their 12 children. Louisa their daughter had already died and Sarah would lose two more of their children after Jeremiah’s death. So I have come to know that Jeremiah was a beloved son, brother, uncle, husband and father. When he died, he had received his temple ordinances and had honored his Priesthood. He was a loving companion to a strong minded and purposeful woman who loved him beyond measure and who now together had a posterity that numbers close to 250,000 grandchildren.

A heritage that words cannot fully express. It is now our duty and privilege to live lives of honor. Sarah's Patriarchal blessing says, "some of your posterity would be very great in His Kingdom". Well, that posterity was created with her eternal companion Jeremiah Leavitt II, and the greatness of whom the blessing spoke will come as each one of us as their grandchildren live righteous lives that honor the covenant that they and we have made. That the chain may be welded for eternity.