

A Short History of John Solomon Fullmer

by

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John Solomon Fullmer was born July 21, 1807 in Huntington, Luzerne, PA, to Peter Fullmer and Susanna Zerfass. There, growing up he worked on his father's farm. He was noted for his neat personal appearance, and he carried himself with a sense of great dignity. He also strove for excellence, even perfection, in everything he did.

John was a well-educated man, and studied law, but he had to work hard for a living. He lived in Nashville, Tennessee for eight years, where he worked in the news office for three years and eventually in a mercantile store. But more importantly, Nashville is where he met and married Mary Ann Price, daughter of John Price and Joan Rucker. Her father was the wealthy owner of a southern cotton plantation and she grew up used to a life of comfort, with servants and a personal maid. She also had a private tutor and was well educated.

John Price disapproved of John Fullmer, and forbade Mary to attend church without an escort, lest John F. should take advantage of the situation to spend time with her. Finally, on May 24, 1837, while her father was away in Texas, John and Mary eloped. When her father returned, he was disappointed that she had married a poor Mormon boy, and he and his family endeavored for years to convince Mary to leave her husband and return to them, even offering her great sums of money.



John S. Fullmer was deeply religious. He considered for a while becoming an ordained Baptist minister. Then in 1835, while he was in the mercantile business, John received a letter from his brother David, containing the news that their parents had moved to Richmond, Ohio. There they had heard the Restored Gospel preached by Mormon missionaries H. L. Sherwood and George A. Smith. David's letters told John of a restoration of the primitive church and of a modern-day prophet, Joseph Smith.

John's parents, his brother David and wife Roda Ann, and his sister Desdamona were all baptized into this new church, and moved to Commerce, Illinois in 1839. John immediately left his business and his family (Mary Ann and two small daughters) and rode to Commerce (renamed Nauvoo) to investigate this “new-fangled religion.” While there, John met the Prophet Joseph Smith and was baptized by him on July 29, 1839. After John's baptism, Joseph wanted to ordain him an Elder, but John declined at that time. He was ordained to that office three months later at the first general conference held in Nauvoo, Oct. 5, 1839.

Shortly thereafter John returned to his family and moved them to Nauvoo. By the spring of 1840 they had moved into their first real home across the street from the prophet and Mary Ann was baptized. There John became the clerk and secretary to the Prophet until 1841, when he was sent to Kentucky on business for the Nauvoo House, which was to be a publicly owned hotel.

From the time John S. came to Nauvoo until the martyrdom, he was very close to both Joseph and Hyrum and their families. Many evenings Joseph would cross the street, or simply call, “John, come on over. There are so many things to talk about.” Joseph and Mary Ann would spend the evening at the Smith's home, where Emma was a welcoming and gracious hostess. Both families had young children and would soon have them to sleep. Then they might roll up the rugs and dance for hours. And many times Joseph would challenge John to a wrestling match. Other families would join them periodically, and sometimes the gatherings were at the

Fullmer home or that of another Saint.

Often the grown-ups would just sit and talk. John loved to ask questions about the Gospel and Joseph never tired of answering. John had a powerful testimony of the Prophet and the Restoration, and wrote formal accounts of the Prophet for member and non-member readers. He once sent to the editor of the New York Herald an account of the martyrdom and the suffering of the saints. It was not printed at the time under the excuse that it was too lengthy for that paper.

John and the other Fullmer men worked on the construction of the Nauvoo Temple, and after its dedication were sealed in that sacred building to their wives. John bore testimony throughout his life to the doctrine of celestial marriage, by which a man and woman could be united for the eternities by the proper priesthood authority.

The Fullmer brothers were also early acquainted with the doctrine of plural marriage. Before 1842 Joseph asked John, David, and Almon permission to take their sister Desdamona as a plural wife. The request must have been a difficult one for the brothers, but they all received a testimony of the principle, gave Joseph their consent, and later followed the Prophet's instructions to enter into this order themselves.

Olive Amanda Smith came with her parents to Nauvoo, where she joined the church. She fell in love with a man of whom her stepfather disapproved and wed him while her parents were away. Her husband went East on an extended business trip and while he was gone Olive's



stepfather intercepted all correspondence between the couple. He then sent Olive away to live with an old couple where she gave birth to her first child, thinking her husband had abandoned her. He must have thought she had abandoned him, for there is no record of him coming back to look for her. John hired Olive to do housekeeping after the birth of his fourth daughter. Nine months later Mary Ann asked Olive to become John's plural wife.

After John formally proposed, Olive decided that she couldn't find a more noble companion and

she agreed to become his wife. They went up to the Prophet's office above his red brick store, where Mary Ann joined their hands and the Prophet Joseph married and sealed them for time and all eternity.

When Joseph and his brother Hyrum went to Carthage, Illinois in 1844 to answer charges, John and his brother Almon accompanied the Prophet and the Patriarch. When Joseph and Hyrum were arrested and jailed on trumped-up riot charges, John accompanied them to their cell along with John Taylor and Willard Richards.

The \$7000 bail was posted, and the Smith brothers were released for one half hour, when they were re-arrested, charged with treason, and thrown back in prison. The second night, fifteen of the Prophet's friends stayed with them, but they all returned home the next day. Only John Taylor and Willard Richards remained, along with three of Joseph's closest friends who refused to leave him: John S. Fullmer, Stephen Markham, and Dan Jones.

The events of the next several hours are recounted as follows by B.H. Roberts in *The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo*:

Because of a shot heard outside the prison at midnight on June 26, the Prophet left his place beside Hyrum on the only bed in the room and lay between Dan Jones and John S. Fullmer on the floor. "Lay your head on my arm for a pillow, Brother John," said the Prophet to Fullmer as he kindly placed his arm under that person's head. Soon all became quiet, except in a low tone Fullmer and the Prophet continued to talk of the pre-sentiments the latter had received of approaching death. "I would like to see my family again," said he, "and I would to God that I could preach to the Saints in Nauvoo once more." Fullmer tried to cheer him by saying he thought he would have that privilege many times. The Prophet thanked Brother John for his kindness of thought for him. Again all was silent.

At about 8:30 a.m. the Prophet sent John S. across the street to purchase some grape juice. Somehow Brother John was able to pass the guards with a single-barrel pistol which he gave to Joseph. After receiving another gun from Elder Wheelock, he gave the first to Hyrum saying, "You may have use for this." "I hate to use such things or to see them used," was Hyrum's reply. "So do I, but we may have to defend ourselves," was the Prophet's response.

Immediately after that conversation, John S. Fullmer received instructions from the Prophet Joseph to return to Nauvoo and [subpoena] witnesses for the coming trial two days later on June 29. When he returned after an attempt to talk to Governor Ford, he was refused a pass into the jail. Fullmer related that perhaps six hours later the murders had been committed.

John S. was a Colonel as well as Paymaster General in the Nauvoo Legion, and treasured a sword that Joseph Smith had given him. He was also a member of the Council of Fifty, which was established by Joseph Smith to plan for the general welfare of the community and plan a migration westward. After the martyrdom the Council took the lead in protecting the Saints and organizing the exodus to the Rocky Mountains. When the mobs that killed the prophet attacked Nauvoo, John played an important role in the city's defense. As a member of the "Spartan Band" commanded by Captain Anderson, he suggested a strategy, hand-picked a group of legionnaires, and then directed an attack which turned the battle in the Saints' favor. John then signed the "Articles of accommodation, treaty, and agreement," formally ending those hostilities.

In his patriarchal blessing, John was told he would be an apostle. Although he never served in the Quorum of the Twelve, he was indeed a special witness of the Savior and of the Restoration. In August 1845, he was sent, along with Elder Henry G. Sherwood, to the James Emmett camp to correct the apostasy that man had introduced. Those who heeded their teachings were rebaptized into the church. John S. himself was baptized there to cure him of an illness he had contracted. He was shortly thereafter strong enough to accomplish his mission.

When the Latter-day Saints were driven out of Nauvoo, Brigham Young appointed John to a committee of three trustees to try to sell the Saints' Nauvoo properties. While most of the Saints left and the beautiful City of Joseph emptied, John and his family remained behind to wrap up the affairs. John and his family, along with his brothers and sisters, finally left Nauvoo in a wagon company led by Willard Richards, and arrived in the Salt Lake Valley October 10, 1848.

In the church's 1852 General Conference in Salt Lake City, John was called on a three-

year mission to England. He departed on Wednesday, September 15, 1852, two days before Albert Heber was born the fifth child to Olive. Mary Ann had seven children between the ages of one and thirteen. Mary Ann taught school to provide for her family. Five months after John left, his eight-year old daughter Mary Ann Francis died.

While travelling to New York to take the ship to England, John he elected to sleep out in the open during the storms and cold weather, as there wasn't enough room for all to sleep under the wagon. He stopped in Pennsylvania to visit his family, to whom he taught the gospel and answered their every objection to the doctrine of plural marriage as easily as those on the basic gospel principles. The doctrine of celestial marriage and the divine mission of Joseph Smith were to be his favorite subjects in teaching the English people. He also repeatedly advocated tolerance and brotherhood among the membership.

John was blessed with many miracles. During the trip from New York to England, he and his brethren calmed the seas with a prayer, and in England he administered to a deaf and dumb boy who was subsequently healed.

In his missionary journal, John records that upon his arrival in England, he was “appointed to take the Pastoral charge of the Manchester, Liverpool and Preston Conferences, each of which [had] a President, and then there [was] also a President in each branch in the several conferences. [His] duty . . . [was] to superintend the whole, both as relates to business, and the propagating of correct principles, and to the prosperity of the work generally in [his] district.”

This assignment gave him the opportunity to travel extensively among the British saints bearing personal testimony of the Prophet Joseph and the Lord’s newly ordained prophet, Brigham Young. He relates in his journal that the saints "feel more highly favoured if one is sent them who is of the old stock, as they say, having had a knowledge of Joseph, the prophet, and an acquaintance with him." As a result, the saints there expected a great deal from Elder Fullmer,

and he was able to have a great impact upon them.

John helped direct the gathering from England. He sailed with a group of Saints on the ship Siddons, which arrived in the U.S. April 20, 1855. He returned to Philadelphia to meet the arrival of two more ships, and eventually returned home to Utah. The next year he also served a mission to Las Vegas.

While on his mission to England, Elder Fullmer met the family of James Stevenson. His daughter Sarah Ann helped the missionaries distribute tracts, and sang with them. Sara Ann fell in love with John, and James asked John to take her as his third wife. John replied that he would agree if she felt the same way after a year. After the time was up, Sarah Ann journeyed to America to wed. Finding John and his families quite poor when she arrived, however, she had second thoughts. During the following year she almost married John Taylor, but decided finally that John was the man for her and they were married on October 12, 1856 in the Endowment House in Salt Lake.



In Utah, John served as Colonel of the First Regiment of Cavalry in Gen. Jedediah M. Grant's cohort of the Militia of the State of Deseret. Because of their fondness for their old home, the Saints still referred to their army as the Nauvoo Legion. John S. was also appointed to the committee of ten (including John Taylor and Parley P. Pratt) to draft the territorial constitution.

John moved his family to Provo, where he and Mary Ann both taught school. He later moved them to Spanish Fork and finally Springville, where he also served as a postmaster. John S. was stricken with paralysis September 21, 1882. Knowing he was near death, he gathered his family around him. He blessed them and charged them to be faithful to the Kingdom of God and their covenants in the Church. Then he told them, "I cannot remain any longer with you; I am going on a great mission."

John Solomon Fullmer died October 8, 1883. His body was interred at the homestead

and later moved to the city cemetery in Springville, where, according to Almon Whiting Babbitt in *Our Pioneer Heritage*, “he was universally esteemed as a man of integrity and a faithful Latter-day Saint.”

A Patriarchal Blessing pronounced upon the head of John S. Fullmer, born July 21, 1807 in the county of Lucerne, Pennsylvania, given by Hyrum Smith, May 29, 1841, Nauvoo, Illinois.

Brother John:

I lay my hands on your head in the name of Jesus of Nazareth to place on your head a blessing, which may be lasting, even everlasting; the same to be handed down to posterity, that your name be perpetuated by posterity, to the latest generation.

First, I place on your head a promise of the gift of the Holy Priesthood, with the gifts and graces of the same; a dispensation of the Gospel; a tongue of utterance which is the power of speech, volubility and the grace of God; together with the love of God, which casteth out fear; that fear which has heretofore rested upon you shall be taken away and you shall ere long preach the gospel in power and demonstration of the spirit unto the convincing many of the error of their ways.

I seal upon your head the promise of the principle and power of faith; a principle obtained by your fathers who obtained promises; the same is the cause which operated on your heart, stirred you up to seek after the Truth, that you might find it; and the blessings which were promised to you be brought to light, that you might be made acquainted with them, and realize them. These blessings which you are now realizing and receiving have come down in the lineage by the promises of the Father in the holy order of God, through the loins of your progenitors, realizing the promised blessings to your fathers, to their children, children's children, unto the latest generation, renewed upon your head by me agreeable to the will of God, like as the promise was renewed unto Isaac and to Jacob, and by them on their seed or posterity after them, handed down from generation to generation, to be perpetuated; the same would be on record fully, were the fullness revealed; all these blessings to be sealed upon your head at this time, because you are of the seed of Jacob from the loins of Joseph in the tribe of Ephraim, and in the same shall you receive your inheritance, and your children after you; and the same blessings which were placed upon the head of Ephraim, and his posterity, save it is that you shall not be scattered nor become a multitude of nations, nor be driven neither far nor near, but you shall have the dews of Heaven and the fruits of the earth, and an inheritance on the land of your fathers; and if you are faithful unto God in keeping His commandments you shall possess in time and the same you shall possess in eternity.

Because of these things you are blessed with these powers; a dispensation of the Gospel of the holy priesthood after the order of Melchizedec, even the greatest priesthood. The same I place upon your head and seal it with these promises, that you shall have all the power of the Holy priesthood; the same holdeth the keys of the knowledge of God. Therefore you shall know Him, for you shall see Him as He is. The same giveth power that you may know all things for all things shall be brought to your remembrance; the same causeth the lame to leap as the hare, the

tongue of the dumb to speak, and deaf to hear, and blind to see, and the dead to live, the same giveth every gift.

These things are your right by promise obtained by your fathers; brought to your remembrance and sealed on your head, which can never be forgotten; hence kept, looked upon and preserved year after year by yourselves and your posterity after you, to the latest generation. By this your name shall be had in honorable remembrance while the earth shall stand.

You shall be blessed with the mysteries of God; this to strengthen your memory, the same is comprised in the above.

You shall have dreams and visions, and you shall be enabled to interpret them, and you shall see perils on seas and on land, and among traitors far from your home, but you shall be delivered from their hands. The power of God shall rest upon you. Then shall the principle of faith, which you know not at this time, be given you. Then shall the power of God be given you, which you have never yet experienced. Your soul shall be filled with consolation in the hour of affliction.

All this because you are called to be an apostle to bear record of the Truth unto many people, and your mission is fixed in the mind of God, and not far hence it shall be made known.

I seal upon your head the holy seal of promise, the Comforter, even the second comforter; the same is the promise of eternal life, for you shall not fall, for I seal you up unto eternal life from this very hour. Though the storms of temptation may come from the Adversary, you shall live and not fall; shall behold many years, and shall have much honor. Your head shall bloom with age and the day shall come when you shall know peace and tranquillity to the extent; when your enemies shall be no more. You shall rest in peace, or be changed as the Lord will, agreeable to your faith, even so

AMEN

(as printed in Bullock, 97-99, her spelling retained)

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