

## **“Why Jacob Went West”**

(This story was taken from a play, "Why Jacob Went West,"  
written by Marty and Wayne Strong.)

My father was Jacob Strong, and my grandfather was another James Strong. Grandfather James purchased 400 acres of land in Indiana County, Penn., and in 1819 moved his family there from York County, Pennsylvania. My father, Jacob, was twenty years old at that time.

James Hill owned adjoining property, and the two men decided to lay out a township. They named it "Strongstown" because grandfather drew the longer straw.

Jacob fell in love with Sarah Hill, James Hill's daughter, and they were married and had five children while they were living in Strongstown--Sarah, Susan, William, Lucinda, and John Albert.

They were Lutherans. One day a young man eighteen years old named Erastus Snow visited their home and told them he was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. He told them how this new church came to be under the leadership of Joseph Smith, a modern day prophet. He told astonishing things--heavenly visitations, a golden record brought forth from the ground by an angel. He told them he too had prayed and had felt an assurance that this church was true.

My parents were very interested and attended meetings and asked questions until the Spirit bore witness in their hearts of its truth. They were baptized by Erastus Snow on Oct. 20, 1836, and later confirmed members of the church.

In September of 1839, Jacob and Sarah and their family said goodbye to their friends and relatives and left to join the Mormons in Nauvoo, III. It took them six months to get there, arriving March 18, 1840.

They became involved in the building of this beautiful city and were happy there. I was born in Nauvoo on Sept. 2, 1841, and I was named James Thomas Strong and given a blessing by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

The hatred and persecutions that had driven the Mormons out of Kirtland and Missouri started again in beautiful Nauvoo. The Prophet Joseph was taunted, beaten, jailed and tried several times, but always acquitted. Finally, Joseph and his brother, Hyrum, and two companions were jailed in Carthage, III. On June 27, 1844, Joseph and Hyrum were shot and killed by an angry mob.

This did not end the Church as the anti-Mormons had hoped, and the persecutions and hatred of the Mormons continued, and they were forced to leave Nauvoo and their beautiful temple. A mass exodus started taking place on Feb. 4, 1846, and on Feb. 11, 1846, the river froze over so thick that four hundred wagons were able to cross on the ice.

Our family sold our ten acres of property to get a wagon and enough supplies to make the trip

and left Nauvoo on May 8, 1846, to join the others in Kanesville (later Council Bluffs).

After we had been in Kanesville about a month Captain James Allen of the U. S. Army came with a message to Brigham Young from Colonel Kearney asking for five hundred men to march in a Mormon Battalion all the way to California. My father, Jacob, was too sick to go, and my brother, William, 18 years old, asked to go in his place. My parents were so worried about sending him, but Captain Allen assured them that the battalion calling would be not to fight the Mexicans, but to make first claim on the land and protect it.

William went and survived the rough trip, and they arrived in San Diego on Jan. 30, 1847. He wasn't officially released until July, 1847. He worked for a time helping to build a sawmill on the American River for Mr. Sutter when gold was discovered (Jan. 24, 1848). He stayed and helped finish the mill, but felt the real "gold" he needed was to get back with his family. A group of them got horses, supplies, and wagons together and began their journey. They finally reached the valley of the Great Salt Lake in September of 1848. William was disappointed to find our family had stayed in Winter Quarters to plant and prepare for others coming west.

William and David Pettigrew left with others called by the church leaders to take 150 yoke of cattle from the valley to meet and assist some approaching companies of people. After helping to take the cattle and other supplies through the mountain passes, William finally found our family on the plains. We were all so happy to see each other. We embraced and cried and had so much to tell and hear. My brother, John Albert, had died in Kanesville a few months after William left. We began to travel again, and after one very bad snowstorm and a few problems, the family finally reached the Salt Lake valley in October, 1849. We were welcomed with much rejoicing. We lived at Pioneer Square for the winter. In the spring we moved to the tenth ward area, and many of the Strong family lived there for many years to come.

Note: On 4th South just below 9th East there is still a small street named "Strong Court".