

Closson & Shedd History in Wheatville & Porcupine Wisconsin

This is taken word for word from the book Regathering the Scattered Saints in Wisconsin and Illinois, by Pearl Wilcox. She published the book herself in 1984 in Independence, Missouri. It gives accounts of when the Closson families and the Shedd's joined the RLDS church. But, is particularly interesting because of the historical information given about the people that joined. Most of her information is gleaned from old Saints Heralds as well as World Church Records.

Wheatville Branch:

The Wheatville branch in Crawford County, twenty-five miles south of Viola, was organized November 9, 1876, by Elder William Savage in the home of Jacob S. Whiteaker. Since the majority of the seven members lived in Clayton Township, adjoining Scott Township on the north, it was decided to call the branch Wheatville.

Jacob S. Whiteaker, his wife Gertrude, with their son Aleric L. had been baptized October 29, 1876, by William Savage. Jacob was ordained an elder and became the first branch president, with Aleric as branch clerk. Others to be baptized were Louisa and Lovina Hancock; Andrew and William O. Closson; and a near neighbor, S. Slade, and his three grandchildren.

Jacob and Gertrude Whiteaker were born and married in Ohio. They became the parents of five children – Catherine, William, Joseph, Wilson, and Aleric. In 1856, two years after the first settler had arrived, the family came to Scott Township in Crawford County. It was just twenty years later that Elder William Savage of the Reorganized church came to the Whiteaker home, converting them and some of the neighbors.

Clossey and Martha (Linston) Closson with their children, Frank, William O., Elizabeth, Margaret, and Andrew V., had been living in Crawford County since 1856. While building their log home, they had lived in the home of their neighbor, Jacob Whiteaker, where they first heard the gospel preached and were converted.

Clossey Closson was born in Sweden June 9, 1822. In 1848 he married Martha Linston and they came to America in 1849. They made their home first in Chicago, then lived in Kane County, Illinois, until 1855. In that year the family started west with an ox team. After weeks of travel they arrived in Crawford County where they purchased land in what is now known as the town of Scott.

In 1862 Clossey Closson enlisted in an army of the Civil War, serving until the war ended and he was honorably discharged. Upon returning home, happy to again be with his family, he resumed farming. In 1866 the Clossons moved across the county line to Akan, Richland County. Here Clossey served as a member of the town board, as assessor for four years, and as town treasurer twelve years.

The Excelsior branch in Richland County was organized in 1881 in the home of William O. and Phoebe Closson, William served as the first branch president. He also was active in the Evergreen and Frankfort branches before moving to Independence, Missouri.

Andrew V. Closson, baptized by William Savage, was ordained an elder and served the Excelsior branch as president. He was later ordained a seventy and still later a high priest. He had married Mary Brown, a convert to the church. They became the parents of four children –Virgie, Glen, Clarice G., and Ola. Andrew was an active missionary in Wisconsin before moving to Independence.

Aleric L. Whiteaker, the first Wheatville branch clerk, married Linda Oerick and did missionary work while his wife lived at the home of his parents. Aleric and Lucinda became the parents of five children – Leonora, Olive D., John L., Iva B., and a son who died in infancy.

In 1877 Elder Amos Bronson visited the Wheatville branch and found Elder William Savage laboring to keep the Saints united in the faith and a good influence on those outside the church. Elder Bronson found that the cry of 'polygamy' usually greeted all the missionaries, but when the 'rubbish' of Salt Lakeism was removed, people became receptive to the teaching of the gospel.

On January 29, 1877, Francis M. Cooper baptized Joseph A. McDowell and his wife, Elizabeth (Squires) McDowell. Elders Aleric Whiteaker and Francis M. Cooper spent considerable time among the Wheatville Saints as well as ministering in outside communities. Among other members were George and Lucy Squires, parents of Elizabeth McDowell; Isaac Anderson, Sr., and his wife Miranda (Wheaton) who became the parents of eight children; and Jefferson H. Thompson who married Susan D. Whiteaker. They became the parents of ten children.

Elder Jacob Whiteaker, first Wheatville branch president, wrote: 'The members are firm in the faith, and are determined by the grace of God assisting them, to overcome, and to gain a victory and haven of rest promised to God's people.' He also told of two cases of remarkable healing, one of a sick child with fever and another of an aged sister who was thrown from her wagon, bruised, speechless, and helpless, but after administration sat up, talked, and ate dinner.

Church services were held in the homes of Jacob Whiteaker; George Squired, Lon Beebe, and Isaac Anderson. All of these homes were in Scott Township except that of the Whiteakers; their home was in Wheatville, less than ten miles northwest. Church services were all-day meetings, with preaching services in the forenoon followed by a family-style dinner, then another preaching service. Every Sunday was eagerly anticipated for the opportunity the day afforded to worship God and to enjoy fellowship.

Jacob Whiteaker built a small church with his own funds. It was located about one-fourth mile east of his home near the cemetery where his parents and several of the Saints were buried. He soon found disappointment in his investment since the missionaries a few years later began preaching more often at Montgomeryville, ten miles to the south. Eventually the little church building became deserted and fell into decay.

Jacob Whiteaker served as presiding elder until 1891. During that year four of the Whiteaker family died; Jacob on April 5; Lucinda, the wife of Aleric, May 9; Wilson R., son of Jacob, October 2; and the mother, Gertrude, wife of Jacob, October 10.

In 1905 a church was built at Montgomeryville; it was soon replaced by a new brick building across the road from the old. Then in 1908 the name of the branch was changed from Wheatville to Soldiers Grove.

Joseph W. Whiteaker was born in Allen County, Indiana, October 7, 1846. In 1855 he came with his parents to Wisconsin, settling near Bell Center. He married Miss Ellen Coleman in September 1867. To them were born ten children. Joseph served many years as president of the Wheatville, later Soldiers Grove, branch, and was respected by all for his faith, counsel, and inspiration.

Eventually the members began to drift to other locations. The Lon Beebes moved to Missouri and the George and Lucy Squires went to California. Aleric Whiteaker, after the death of his wife Lucinda, married Mrs. Jane Thompson and moved to Chetek, Wisconsin. Several of the Clossons moved to Independence. Joseph Whiteaker died August 20, 1927; Ellen, his wife, had died February 25, 1926.

The Wheatville branch as well as other Wisconsin branches served the purpose of uniting many Latter Day Saint families in the church, but many of these sites eventually became historical data only.

Frankfort Branch at Porcupine:

The Frankfort branch at Porcupine in Pepin County, Wisconsin, came about as the result of the visit of a young missionary, Herbert P. Curtis to the home of his Aunt Rachel E. Metcalf. Also living here was Uncle Percy Curtis, brother of Rachel.

At the same time Elder Charles H. Burr was preaching in the vicinity. No doubt he came to Porcupine by the invitation of Joseph W. Heath, Jr., the only known church member in the locality at the time. He had been baptized into the old church organization on July 18, 1852, Clearfield County, Pennsylvania, by Elder Rowland Cobb. He was born at the location January 10, 1822. His wife Elizabeth was born in Stierendorf, Germany, August 23, 1833. After their marriage they came to Frankfort in 1863.

Missionaries Curtis and Burr were interested in bringing these people the story of the Reorganized church. They gained permission to use the Maple Ridge schoolhouse. Among those attending were two young farmhands, Murry and Morse Shedd. They became so interested in the message these Mormon preachers brought that they asked them to come to the Porcupine schoolhouse and hold a series of services. In January of 1864, with the temperature below zero, the schoolhouse was filled each night, although some just came to look at the 'Mormon' preachers since the services had been well advertised. When Hulda (Mrs. Frank Livingston) heard of the preaching services she could hardly wait to attend. She remembered how at the age of four, she had listened to her father read a newspaper account of the tragedy at Nauvoo when Joseph and Hyrum were killed. Her parents were John L. and Hulda Bundy of Fox, Pennsylvania, where Hulda was born in 1840. The parents were members of the old church organization and died before learning of the Reorganization. In 1864 Hulda came to Wisconsin and married James Franklin Livingston and settled in Porcupine Valley in 1885. Six children were born to her, one dying in early childhood; the others were Sheridan, Wilson, Judson, William, and Anna.

As Hulda listened to the preaching of the elders, she began to tremble from head to foot; the Holy Spirit bore witness that this was the 'angel's message' that she had been taught by her parents. She was baptized February 5, 1894, and was instantly healed of an illness of long standing. She was followed in baptism by her husband, Frank Livingston, Emily Hoyt, Violetta Veness, Anna Hill, Dulcene Bingnal, Helen King, and Eli and Nancy Place.

On March 4, 1894, Rachel (Curtis) Metcalf was baptized. She had been among the first to open her house to the missionaries. She was born August 13, 1826, at Livingston, New York. She married William Metcalf September 28, 1840, and they became the parents of eight children who became active in the church. On the same day Rachel was baptized, Sally Shedd was baptized. She was the mother of the two young men who asked the

elders to preach at Porcupine. During the year thirty-two were baptized. These baptisms took place in Porcupine Creek, a little stream about two feet deep except for a few deep holes which had been dug out for swimming.

Of Nancy Place, a charter member, the following can be found in the History of Buffalo and Pepin Counties:

She is a lady highly respected and with numerous friends. At times she indulges her strong natural taste for poetry, and some of her most noteworthy productions of this kind have been issued from the press. One of these gives a vivid description of old time days in and around Porcupine depicting pioneer scenes and doing with close fidelity of historical facts.

In a lengthy poem she tells how the fair valley happened to be named and how it has kept the same name to the present day. The 'mountain' in the shape of a hog's back is still Hog's Back Hill, where an early settler killed the largest porcupine he had ever seen; the place was therefore named Porcupine.

After so many baptisms the usual persecution began, but these Saints did not get discouraged. They maintained their faith with the blessings of God sustaining them. Elder Willis A. McDowell came to the assistance of Elders Curtis and Burr, making a very effectual three-man team.

On October 16, 1894, those faithful few met at the Porcupine schoolhouse and the Frankfort branch was organized by Curtis and McDowell. The first officers chosen were Herbert P. Curtis, president, George Longsdorf, clerk; and Joseph Heath, Jr., teacher. Of Curtis, there seems to be no information available concerning him. We find George Longsdorf was born February 22, 1840, at Fairview, Pennsylvania. His wife Anna was born at Carroll, in the same state, March 21 1849.

Andrew Closson became the second branch president in 1895, serving until 1900. After the membership reached fifty the Saints decided to a church. Jim Shaw, a nonmember, donated the ground. His brother, Isaiah Shaw, gave two thousand feet of logs to be sawed into lumber. Andrew Closson was a good carpenter and offered his services along with others. Rock for the foundation was quarried from the Joseph Heath farm, and Joseph Warren also contributed logs to be cut at the sawmill. The seats were designed and made by Andrew Closson. A bell was purchased from the Catholic Church at Eau Galle, Wisconsin. When the stoves were set up and the kerosene lamps hung the church was ready after two years of work and sacrifice.

Local men who had been called to the priesthood during this time were William Livingston (teacher and priest), Joseph V. Heath (teacher), Leroy Veness (priest), William H. Edwards (deacon), Orson A. Warren (deacon), William Hutchinson (elder), Sheridan Livingston (priest), Ralph H. Livingston (deacon), George E. Rose (deacon), William Earl Livingston (priest), and Morse Shedd (teacher).

In 1896 Mamie Closson organized 'The Mite Society,' becoming the first president. The same year the first choir of twelve members was organized and Mary (Mrs. Valentine) White became the first organist. The first Sunday school was called, 'The Prince of Peace,' a name chosen by Mary Metcalf, the first secretary and treasurer. Mary White became the first superintendent, assisted by S.E. Livingston. The first Zion's Religio was organized in 1900 with Joseph Warren president, William Livingston vice-president, Lilly Girard secretary, and Maggie Closson treasurer.

Sheridan Livingston became the pastor of the branch October 1, 1900, and served for the next twenty-six years. Sheridan was born January 26, 1865, at Trempealeau, Wisconsin; baptized December 5, 1898; and ordained an elder at Frankfort. His wife, Lenora, was born July 17, 1865, at Waubeka, Wisconsin. They became the parents of eight children. In 1901 thirty members transferred from Frankfort to the Ono branch; in 1917 twenty members transferred to the Rock Elm branch. These two branches were only a few miles from Frankfort. The Ono branch existed a short time and some of the members came to the Rock Elm branch when it was organized in 1917.

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