

EMMA SMITH - PORTRAIT OF A LADY

By Carol E. Starks

Most authors chronicle the life of Emma Smith in a format of life progression or they emphasize specifically selected aspects of her various contributions to her family or the church. This portrait of the restoration's first lady will be from a categorical perspective. It is this author's belief that her character, courage and commitment become much more evident in such a format.

Date and Place of Birth

Emma was born on July 10, 1804 in Harmony, Susquehanna Valley, PA.

Ancestry

Emma's parents were Isaac and Elizabeth Hale. The family was originally from Vermont. Emma was the third girl and seventh child of nine children. They were descendents of John Howland who left England on the Mayflower. (Joseph Smith was also a descendent of John Howland.) In August of 1830, when Emma was 26 years old, she and Joseph left Harmony. She corresponded with her parents while she was in Kirtland, but she never saw them again.

Physical Description

Emma was about 5'9" tall. (Her bones were measured when Frederick M. Smith had the graves moved and properly marked in 1928.) Men described her as "well turned, of excellent form...with splendid physical development." She stood tall and erect and was physically strong. She had dark hazel eyes which complemented her olive complexion. She usually brushed her long dark hair to a shine, parted it in the middle and fastened it snugly against the nape of her neck. She sometimes wore little curls at the sides of her face.

Attire

Emma wore simple homemade dresses, which were dark in color, full skirted and gathered at the waist. Large starched white

aprons were worn over the dresses. She always wore gold beads given to her by Joseph and a one-hand Swiss watch.

Marriages

Emma eloped with Joseph Smith on January 18, 1827. The marriage took place in Esquire Zachariah Tarbell's parlor in South Bainbridge, New York. Because of Isaac Hale's indignation over her marriage to Joseph, they escaped by fleeing 130 miles to Manchester, New York. They were married for 17 years. Emma was 39 when Joseph was killed. On December 27, 1847, Emma married Lewis (Louis in some accounts) C. Bidamon who never embraced Mormonism. They were married for 32 years, almost double the time of the Smith marriage.

Children

Pregnancies caused Emma considerable discomfort, which ranged from fainting spells to severe nausea. These symptoms sometimes lasted throughout her pregnancies. Her children were:

*Alvin, June 15, 1828, Harmony, PA - Reportedly had birth defects and lived only three hours. Emma almost died.

*Thaddeus and Louisa, April 30, 1831, Kirtland, OH - Lived only three hours.

*Joseph and Julia Murdock, May 3, 1831, Kirtland, OH - Adopted by Joseph and Emma. Joseph died March 29, 1832 at ten months of measles and exposure to cold when a mob attacked the family. Julia married twice, had no children and died in 1880 of cancer.

*Joseph, III, November 6, 1832, Kirtland, OH - Joseph married three times, had seventeen children and died in 1914.

*Frederick Granger Williams, June 20, 1836, Kirtland, OH - Frederick had one child and died in 1862.

*Alexander Hale, June 2, 1838, Far West, MO - Alexander had nine children and died in 1909.

*Don Carlos, June 14, 1840, Nauvoo, ILL - Died at fourteen months of malaria.

*Stillborn son, February 6, 1842, Nauvoo, ILL.

*David Hyrum, November 11, 1844, Nauvoo, ILL - Had one child and died of diabetes in 1904. To summarize, Emma gave birth to nine children and adopted two more for a total of eleven. Of those eleven, six died in infancy and five lived into adulthood. Emma gave birth first at age 23 and had her last child at age 40. Her children were born from less than 2 years to 3.5 years apart, when she was 23, 26, 28, 31, 33, 35, 37 and 40. Some authors report that Louis Bidamon had an illegitimate son, Charles. When he was four years old, Emma took him in and raised him.

Homes

Emma's childhood home was in Harmony, PA. She and Joseph moved six times while in New York and Pennsylvania. She lived in at least six residences in Ohio and was even homeless while Joseph was in hiding. Her family lived in two locations in Far West, MO. While in Illinois, Emma moved seven times. Emma and her family often lived in the homes of others. In her 79 years, she lived in five states and in at least twenty-five homes. Many locations were hundreds of miles apart. Means of travel included wagon, horseback, sleigh and on foot.

Domestic Chores

Emma's household responsibilities are incomprehensible to those of us with modern conveniences. Besides caring for her children and her husband, she made candles, gardened, cured meat, dried fruit and vegetables, made cheese, made "ash cakes" of cornmeal, baked bread and cookies, corded and spun her own wool, knitted, weaved, sewed, patched and mended, washed clothes on a washboard and boiled clothes with homemade soap.

Other Work

Emma taught school in Harmony when she was a young woman. She sewed clothing for missionaries and helped others outfit the Zion's Camp army with food and clothing and provisions for the homeless Missouri Mormons. She opened her home to boarders and operated an inn to supplement the family income for forty-seven years. She had power of attorney to supply goods for the hotel. While in Kirtland she took in temple construction workers as boarders. Young women needing a place to live joined the household as domestic workers. In Joseph's many absences she earned income by buying, selling, bartering and trading. Emma served as a nurse and assisted at births. She took in and raised orphans, children of single fathers and those of families in need. Emma made personal contacts with Governor Carlin of ILL for the Mormon people and her husband. After Joseph's death, Emma was allowed two horses, two cows and \$124 a year by those in charge of the church.

Church Involvement and Responsibilities

Emma was baptized on June 28, 1830 by Oliver Cowdery. She was confirmed at a later date due to mob interference and Joseph's arrest on the day of the baptism. A revelation (Section 24) was given to Emma designating her as the "elect lady" and delineating her responsibilities to Joseph and the church. She served as a scribe for Joseph while translating the Book of Mormon. She compiled hymns for the church's first hymnal. Joseph Smith, Sr. gave her her patriarchal blessing on December 9, 1834. She was president of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo. Her home in Nauvoo was the way station for communications about the church, business and legal matters. She assumed much responsibility for Joseph's welfare. She kept the manuscript of the Inspired Version of the Scriptures safe until she turned it over to the RLDS church in 1866.

Character

Emma's talents included lively and witty speech, a lyric soprano singing voice and skill and fluency in written language. Emma knew how to canoe and ride a horse. She attended a girl's school for a year and was considered very bright. She was physically and emotionally strong and quiet, but sociable. It is said that she moved with slow precision, but was capable of doing an amazing amount of work in a little time. Her faith was deep and she knew the Bible well. Emma was self-sufficient during Joseph's absences. Her love, affection and loyalty helped sustain him when they were apart. Her compassion and sense of others' needs endeared her to church members. She was frugal with home necessities. She was steadfast in her beliefs. Once she was confronted by a deputy and "faced the man down" and he left. She gave Joseph an ultimatum about a bar set up in her home by Porter Rockwell and it was removed. Emma Smith was a pioneer and stood the trials of such. Joseph's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, said, "I never saw a woman who could and did endure affliction as Emma has done."

Separations from Husband

Joseph went on several trips to accomplish work for the church, but he was also arrested and incarcerated a number of times. It was necessary for him to go in hiding at times. These separations from Emma and the family were difficult for her. He was arrested at least three times while in New York. He was either allowed to escape or no conviction occurred. After Governor Bogg's extermination order, he and others were taken prisoner and incarcerated in Liberty, Missouri for several months. Again, he was allowed to leave. While in Nauvoo, he was arrested at least four times and either escaped or was acquitted after three of those arrests and was martyred after the final arrest. Emma was left to care for the children, the household, the inn (Nauvoo) and some of the affairs of the church in addition to experiencing concern for her

husband and others.

Mob Violence Terror

Mob violence constantly threatened Emma and Joseph. Threats, rumors and evening raids began in Palmyra. Mobs almost prevented Emma's baptism in Harmony. While in Kirtland Joseph was dragged from their home and tarred and feathered. He escaped castration and poisoning. There were many incidents of violence in Missouri prompting the Zion's camp support. Roving mobs followed the saints to Far West and other settlements. The saints were not immune from mob violence in Nauvoo. It continued after Joseph's death. Emma moved her family out of the city for a time.

Emma and Joseph's Posterity

Julia Murdock Smith returned to Nauvoo to be with Emma later in her life. She died a year after Emma died. Joseph Smith, III was president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ for 53 years. Frederick Granger Williams Smith died a young man in 1862. Alexander Hale Smith was an apostle, Presiding Patriarch and member of the first presidency. David Smith was a member of the first presidency, a missionary and the author of hymns.

Brush Strokes in the Portrait of a Lady

Physically and emotionally strong
Intelligent
Long-suffering
Survived 8 births (one for twins)
Survived serious illnesses
Independent
Patient
Faithful and stalwart in her testimony
Talented - language, music, motherhood
Excellent disciplinarian
Loved and respected
Loyal to her husband
Perceptive about other people
Dearly loved by her husband
Industrious
Skilled in education, nursing and business
Shared food, clothing and shelter when she

had little for herself and her family
Rarely had any privacy
Willing to sacrifice her relationship with her
parents
Suffered the deaths of many children,
siblings, parents, in-laws, friends and
husband
Survived the elements many times
Stood her ground against enemies,
politicians and priesthood leaders with
whom she disagreed

Death and Burial

Emma Smith died April 30, 1879 at age 74.
She was buried at the Nauvoo Homestead.