

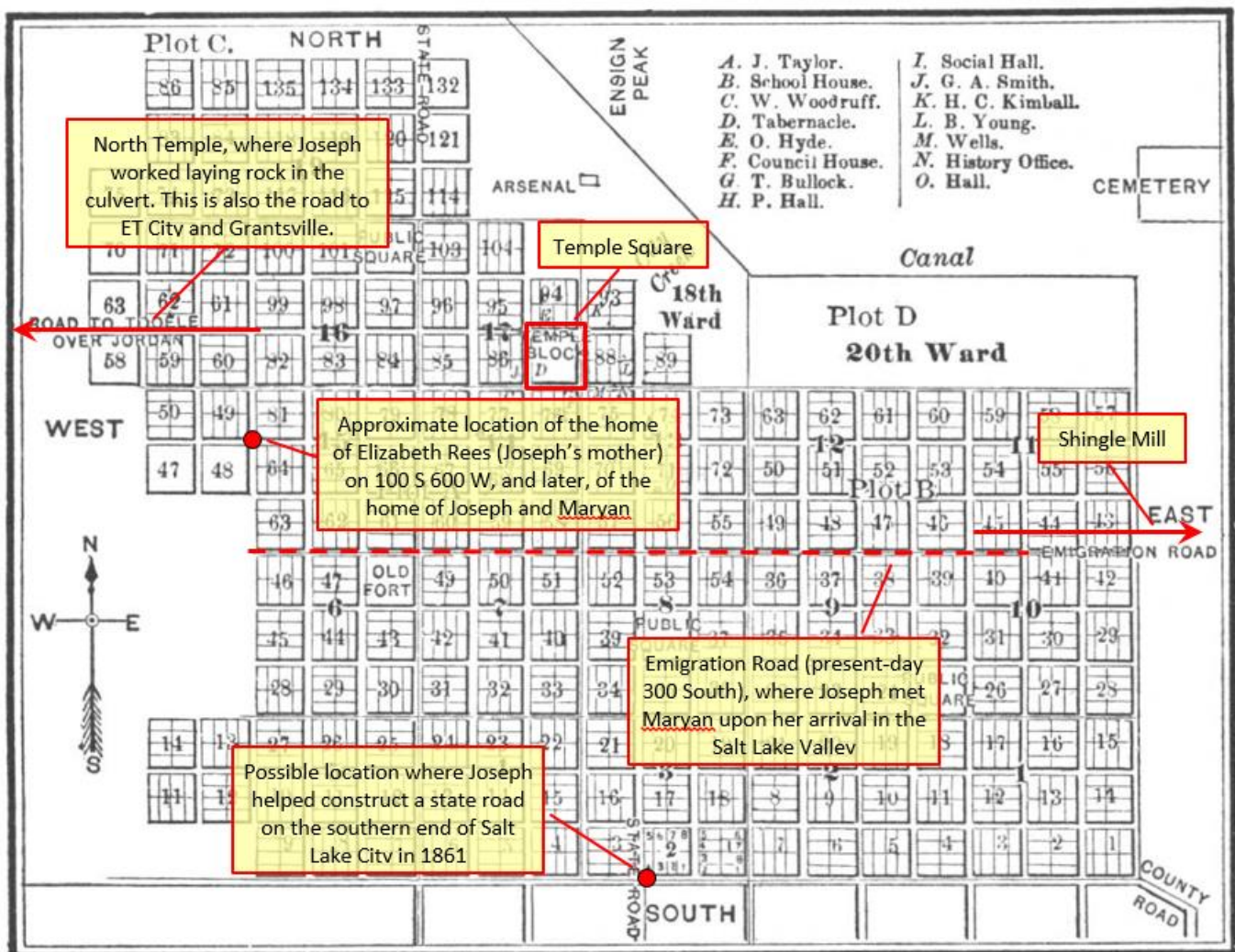
Rees Pioneer Day 2014

October 29, 2014

Dear Family,

Happy Rees Pioneer Day! On this day in 1855, our ancestor Joseph Alexander Rees first arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, having traveled from Fishguard, Wales with his mother Elizabeth, father William, and older brothers William and David.

In this installment, I will attempt to provide a chronology of some key events¹ and locations from Joseph's return to Utah in 1861 until the death of his first wife, Maryan Jenkins, in 1872. The details on Maryan are light, presumably because Joseph did not begin to write his history until several decades after her passing. From what little can be gleaned however, it is clear that she was a remarkable pioneer woman, laboring alongside, supporting, and inspiring Joseph as they worked to build a new life in frontier Utah.



SALT LAKE CITY IN 1860.

¹ For the sake of brevity, I am not including certain notable events, such as the births of Joseph's and Maryan's five children

These were formative years for Joseph, who had gone from relative wealth and comfort in Wales to a hardscrabble life as a pioneer, then *back* to Wales for a short period (against his wishes), then *back* across the Atlantic to an *even more* hardscrabble life in frontier Utah. As he discovered upon his return, his life of comfort and ease in Wales was now just a pleasant memory; he was beginning his life in Utah on the ground floor.

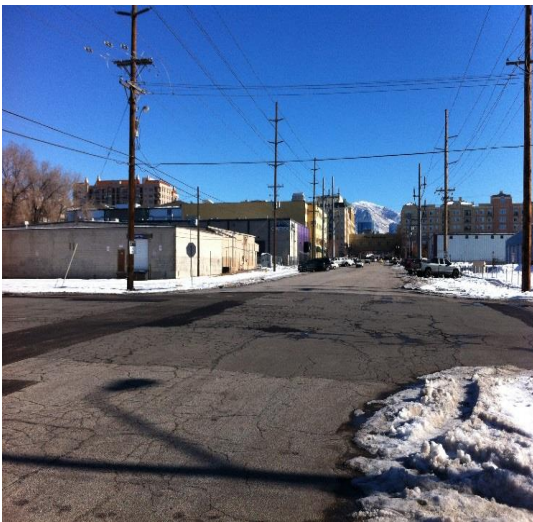
I now had to work. What could I do? My education was nil. I was not versed in the use of tools. I had not learned to plough nor bind. Mechanism was foreign to my understanding. Even to the simpler industrial processes I was a stranger. I was, however, dextrous in the use of the axe. I could handle the pick and shovel and wheel the barrow. (Joseph A. Rees autobiography, p. 32)

As you will note from the events below, Joseph Rees was not afraid of hard work. Though he had neither qualifications nor experience, with trademark humility he put his head down and got to work, gratefully accepting any jobs he could find. He also surrounded himself with people who inspired him to improve himself and his conditions, and who blessed his life. In all of this, he maintained a genuinely positive outlook; a humble acceptance for what he had lost, and a true gratitude for all that he had.

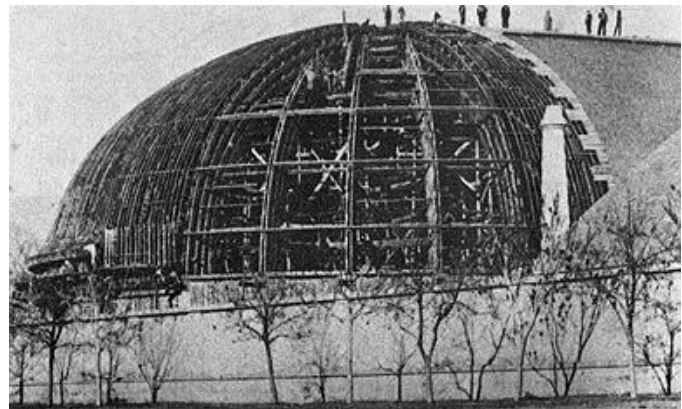
Perhaps a few of you living in or around Utah (or those that happen to be passing through or looking for a good excuse for a road trip) may be inspired to visit some of these ancestral haunts that helped to shape Joseph's life.

1861

- Upon Joseph's return to Utah in the fall of 1861, he lived with his mother Elizabeth in an adobe home on 100 South and 600 West, in what was then the 15th Ward (congregation), and which today is roughly the area just west of the Gateway Mall in downtown Salt Lake City. In those days, he would likely have been able to clearly see the shell of the Salt Lake Tabernacle, still under construction, from his house.



This is what the area near Joseph's home, circa 1861, looks like today. This view is looking east from 100 S 600 W. The tallest building near the center of the photo is the LDS Church Office Building, which lies just beyond the Temple Square.



The Tabernacle, circa 1861

- Joseph's autobiography mentions working—hauling wood—on Bishop Cunningham's farm along the Jordan River. Bishop Cunningham was the leader of the 15th Ward of the LDS Church in downtown Salt Lake City. I have not been able to identify the precise location of the Cunningham farm, but it was most likely somewhere near present-day West Jordan.
- In this year he also worked in a shingle mill on East Canyon Creek, which appears to have been up Emigration Canyon.

I became quite expert in picking shingles in front of the descending knife. More than one of the boys had their fingers cut off at the same business. Here too, I did considerable chopping and hauling logs to the mill. (Joseph A. Rees autobiography, p. 25)

I imagine the mill was not too much unlike [this one](#), though probably less advanced—that should give you an appreciation for the finger hazards that Joseph mentions.

- In this year he also helped construct a state road on the southern limits of Salt Lake City, which at this time would have extended to about 900 South. This is a job that would ultimately change the course of his life; he helped construct the road alongside a Welsh entrepreneur named William Ajax, whom he refers to as a “sympathetic companion” and “above all, an inspirer.” It was Brother Ajax who presented Joseph with his first “Davis-Porthcawl” English dictionary, which he read from cover to cover with “unquenchable avidity and deepest interest.” Brother Ajax then can be credited for at least a portion of the inspiration Joseph had at this time to “develop [his] mind for usefulness and to cultivate [his] habits so as to be more and more in harmony with an ideal that never forsook [him].” Further pursuing this new thirst for knowledge, Joseph would sometimes visit the Welsh poet William Lewis, who would also, a few years hence, have a significant impact on his life. (Joseph A. Rees autobiography, p. 32)



William Ajax

1862

- Again from Joseph’s autobiography, another life-changing event—meeting a beautiful, 18 year-old young lady from his hometown of Fishguard, Wales, just as she was arriving in the Salt Lake Valley:



Mormon pioneers traversing Echo Canyon

One day 1862 while getting the timber I saw a cloud of dust on the Emigration road [extending from Echo Canyon down to roughly present-day 300 South in Salt Lake City]. Anxious to see the travelling saints, I left my partners, one Wilson Rawley, in charge and curiously scanned the weary yet merry travellers. I hurried forward after being told that a young lady of my native town was somewhere in the front. After a walk of nearly 10 miles I was gladdened by seeing and kissing a beautiful young lady whom I once well knew by name Maryan Jenkins who in a few months became my wife--Feb. 21, 1863.” (Joseph A. Rees autobiography, p. 25)

By the time Maryan’s party arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, it was dark. Joseph enjoyed the privilege of escorting her from Echo Canyon down the Emigration road, to his mother’s adobe home in the 15th ward.

1863

- Joseph Rees and Maryan Jenkins were married by Bishop Cunningham in his mother's adobe house on February 21, after which the marriage was solemnized in the Endowment House [which no longer stands, but which was located inside present-day Temple Square] by Heber C. Kimball.
- Both Maryan and Joseph worked at the same shingle mill from early spring until hay season, at which point they began cutting hay near Snyderville (Park City), working for a man named Keller.



The Endowment House in Salt Lake City, UT

One of Keller's wives had a wooden leg. One night the cruel old boss got very angry at her, took her wooden leg which lay along side her in the wagon box and commenced punching her. She called for help. I was on hand in an instant. I will let the reader imagine what took place. (Joseph A. Rees autobiography, p. 26)

- Before the onset of winter, Joseph and Maryan purchased a half lot from Joseph's mother and built, and partially furnished, a one room adobe house. At about this same time, Maryan's sixteen year-old brother William, who suffered from epilepsy, arrived from Wales. Joseph and Maryan (who was about six months pregnant at the time) took him in and cared for him in their one room home.

1865 - 1866

- In Sanpete County serving in the Black Hawk War. Too much information to summarize here; this will have to be the subject for a future Rees Pioneer Day letter.

1867

- In late fall of this year, a friend named James James from Joseph's *first* stay in Utah (circa 1856) came to his and Maryan's home in the 15th Ward with the following message:

"William Lewis" (Gwilym Ddu) tells me that you will make a first class school teacher. We need one at [E.T. City](#) where I now live and am one of the trustees and I came to see you to find whether you'd like to accept the position. (Joseph A. Rees autobiography, p. 33)

Recall that this is the same William Lewis whom Joseph had met and developed a friendship with in 1861 after having been inspired by William Ajax's gift of an English dictionary. With Maryan's unwavering support², Joseph accepted the job. He walked the 23 miles to E.T. City (named for early LDS church leader Ezra T. Benson), taught there for 24 weeks, then walked the 23 miles back to his home in the 15th Ward. Of his first experience teaching, he writes:

My self-reliance increased, egoism decreased, and I was in a fair way to launch myself on a sea of worthiness. As yet I had no quadrant or compass but a whole complement of sail. Nor was I well ballasted. I came to the conclusion that God puts the oak in the forest, pine on the mountainside and says to men, "There are your houses, go hew, saw, shape, frame and build." I accepted the condition. (Joseph A. Rees autobiography, p. 33)

1868

- While at work laying rock in a culvert on North Temple Street, a man from Grantsville named Elisha Hubbard stopped by and invited Joseph to teach school in Grantsville (which is just a few miles west of E.T. City). He accepted, and the family moved to Grantsville in the fall of that year.

² "Without a moments hesitation she answered, 'Yes, no one can do better than you'" (Joseph A. Rees Autobiography, p. 33). Maryan stayed behind in their adobe home in the 15th ward, caring for their three young children alone for the next six months.

1872

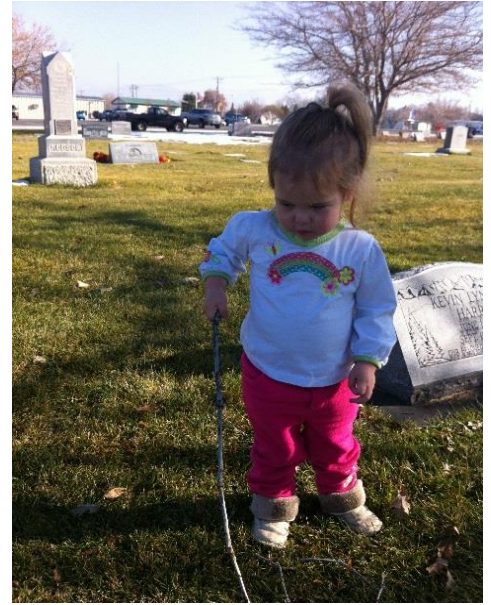
- Again, from Joseph's autobiography:

After nine years of married life she [Maryan Jenkins] gave birth to another girl baby which very probably brought about her death in the spring of 1872. We named our baby Maryan. On her mothers breast she was laid to rest in the cemetery at Grantsville. The funeral was a large one and the sympathy of the people genuine. I hope she'll be mine again. (Joseph A. Rees autobiography, p. 27)

Maryan, I discovered, is buried in an unmarked grave in the Grantsville City Cemetery (429 East Main Street, near the Daughters of Utah Pioneers museum and the J. Reuben Clark Historical Farm). Joseph presumably lacked the means at this period in his life to erect a headstone. Although none of us on this distribution is descended through Maryan, providing this sweet woman with a proper headstone would, I believe, be a worthy Rees family endeavor. Maryan's plot is K, section 2, lot 2, 4E. From the east side of the gazebo that houses the sextant's register, walk 13 paces north, just past the large tree, then 9 paces east to her grave.

In a touching postscript, about thirteen years after burying his wife Maryan with their infant daughter Maryan in her arms, Joseph's second wife, Amelia Hessel, gave birth to a daughter. They named her Maryan.

I close this year with a thought from Joseph's autobiography that he capably demonstrated throughout his noble life: The necessary raw material is freely furnished out of which the fabric of life, be in noble or ignoble, is woven.



Hannah Rees (Joseph A. Rees's great-great-great granddaughter) pointing out the location of Maryan Jenkins Rees's unmarked grave in the Grantsville, Utah cemetery