

Rees Pioneer Day 2019

October 29, 2019

Dear Family,

Happy Rees Pioneer Day! On this day in 1855, our Rees ancestors—father William, mother Elizabeth, and children William, David, and Joseph—first entered the Salt Lake Valley, completing a 6 ½ month journey by ship, train, and ox-drawn wagon from their native Fishguard, Wales.

“Tell me with whom you associate, and I will tell you who you are.” – Goethe

The photo below, taken circa 1920, shows Joseph Rees with many of the most important contemporary leaders of Utah. So how did an unschooled boy, a penniless immigrant from Wales, end up in such esteemed company?



Joseph Rees was a doer, and he was drawn to those who were likewise actively engaged in life. A key theme that emerges in Joseph’s autobiography is the importance of *quality* friendships that throughout his life uplifted, inspired, and opened doors. In this year’s letter, I will highlight a few of these associations which changed the course of *his* life, and the lives of his family members and of all of us, his descendants.

The portion excerpted below from Joseph’s autobiography begins shortly after his second arrival in the Salt Lake Valley in late 1861. His mother Elizabeth had worked and saved diligently for a year in order to secure passage for him to again cross the Atlantic and return to Utah. Now in Utah, he needed to work to support himself, but as a 21-year-old with only three years of schooling, he found his employment options limited.

The Great Turning Point

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. I found a sympathetic companion, Wm. Ajax, and with him was among the first to help make a State Road beginning on the southern limits of Salt Lake City. Bro Ajax was about 40 years of age, a linguist of some note and above all an inspirer. After this I found but little trouble in getting work at the same time a something seemed to urge me to develop my mind for usefulness and to cultivate my habits so as to be more and more in harmony with an ideal that never forsook me.

I was presented with an English dictionary by "Davis-Porthcawl". It was the first I had ever seen. With unquenchable avidity and deepest interest I pursued its contents step by step from cover to cover determined to get out of them all my untrained mind was capable of getting. At times I would visit the Welsh poet William Lewis, surnamed Gwilym Ddu. I would listen to and admire his poetical effusions. At last I became so interested in literature--prose and poetry--that I ventured to take part in those early gatherings of the Welsh people called Eisteddvodai [sic]. Succeeding--at least in a small part--in my humble efforts and receiving encouragement from a few friends I determined to make the best use I could of those higher activities inherent in me.

Finding myself anxious to put into practice the gifts and powers--weak as I knew they were in order to strengthen and to increase them. I looked around here and there and everywhere for a place for their proper exercise. Often, indeed, I was bewildered. No one capable to give me direction or assistance or put forth a willing hand. Maybe I was prematurely anxious. Possibly the germinating period hadn't arrived. The time to fully answer my prayers was yet in the future. Probably my uncouthness stood in my way--that I was the deterrent factor operating unconsciously against myself. Yet I kept on preparing for something I knew not what. Something must, shall turn up.

One cold, snowy night while Maryan and I sat by the fireside our little babe sweetly asleep—a knock at the door interrupted our conversation. In stepped an acquaintance of 1856 and who now lived in Tooele County. He delivered his message: "William Lewis" (Gwilym Ddu) tells me that you will make a first class school teacher. We need one at E.T. City [an early settlement in Tooele Valley named for Ezra Taft Benson] 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." "Maryan", said I, "what do you think about it?" Without a moments hesitation she answered, "Yes, no one can do better than you". I then agreed with Bro. James James to "try it". This was the great turning point in my life. (Rees)

Following this invitation from William Lewis, Joseph put all his energies into learning how to become a teacher, often staying up late into the night in order to learn, for the first time, the subject he was to teach his young students the next day. It was this teaching job, through his friendship with William Lewis, that set in motion Joseph's long career as a teacher, ultimately becoming one of the most influential educators in Utah.

A Key Friendship With a Grantsville Neighbor

Joseph's wife Maryan had been his first and strongest supporter as he began his career as an educator. Sadly, after a too-short marriage of nine years, Maryan died in childbirth in 1872. Here Joseph writes of the kindness of the citizens of their city of Grantsville following her death:

After nine years of married life she 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. (Rees)


Following the death of Maryan, Joseph was introduced to and married the daughter of his neighbors, Swedish immigrants Peter and Margaret Hessel. This daughter, Christina Amelia ("Amelia"), brought to their union a daughter, Annie Telula ("Lulu"), from her prior marriage to Charles Crismon, and bore Joseph an additional 12 children. It is through Amelia that nearly all those on this distribution are descended.

From what little we know of Amelia, she was a remarkable woman with a profound influence on her husband and children. And, while Maryan provided Joseph with the initial encouragement to pursue a career as an educator, it is fair to say that it is largely due to his marriage to Amelia that Joseph was able to succeed in this pursuit.

Page No. 2 } Inquiries numbered 7, 18, and 17 are not to be asked in respect to merely b

SCHEDULE 1.—Inhabitants in *Grantsville* of *Utah*, enumerated by me on the *13th* day of *June* Post Office: *Grantsville*

1	2	3	4			7	8	
			5	6	8		9	
1	<i>A. C. Johnson</i>	<i>owner</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Carpenter</i>		<i>100</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
2		<i>owner</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>			<i>Sweden</i>
3		<i>owner</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>			<i>Sweden</i>
4		<i>owner</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>			<i>Utah</i>
5	<i>Larsen</i>	<i>husband</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Farmer</i>		<i>100</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
6		<i>owner</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>			<i>Sweden</i>
7	<i>J. S. Rees</i>	<i>husband</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Farmer</i>		<i>100</i>	<i>Utah</i>
8		<i>owner</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>			<i>Utah</i>
9		<i>owner</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>			<i>Utah</i>
10		<i>owner</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>			<i>Utah</i>
11		<i>owner</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>			<i>Utah</i>
12		<i>owner</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>			<i>Utah</i>
13	<i>Andrew Williams</i>	<i>owner</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Invalid</i>			<i>Utah</i>
14	<i>J. J. Olson</i>	<i>owner</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>		<i>200</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
15		<i>owner</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>			<i>Sweden</i>
16	<i>J. W. Reed</i>	<i>owner</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Carpenter</i>			<i>Sweden</i>
17		<i>owner</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>at home</i>			<i>Sweden</i>



Page from the 1870 US census in Grantsville, showing that Joseph Rees's family (in red) and Amelia Hessel's parents (in blue) were neighbors. Amelia (Joseph's second wife) does not appear on this census, as she was at this time married to Charles Crismon. Joseph's wife at this time was Maryan Jenkins, who died in childbirth two years after this census. Inset: Margaret and Peter Hessel.

Friends in Education

The abbreviated version of Joseph's story as an educator is that when he arrived in Utah for the second time in the fall of 1861, he had limited education and even more limited opportunities for education—his primary focus was on supporting himself and his mother, and eventually his young family by digging ditches, farming, hauling wood, hauling wheat, working at a shingle mill, etc. He was, as he states, "young and full of untrained and undirected ambition (Rees)." And, when given the opportunity by William Lewis to become a schoolteacher in E.T. City, he gave training and direction to that ambition. For the next more than forty years, Joseph focused on becoming the best educator he could be, and on providing quality educational opportunities to as many children as he possibly could. The photo below (thank you to Kelly Derrick for posting this and other, related photos on familysearch.org), taken near the end of Joseph's career, when he was a member of the Board of Trustees of Brigham Young University, provides a glimpse into the quality of his professional friendships. The photo is a virtual Who's Who of early leaders of Utah and of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.



Reeses in front of Brigham Young Academy (now the Provo City Library) almost exactly 100 years apart.

- Photo on left (L-R): Royal Murdock, Lafayette Holbrook, Franklin S. Harris, Joseph A. Rees (circled), Susa Young Gates, George H. Brimhall, Zina Young Card, Joseph Fielding Smith, Heber J. Grant, James E. Talmage, John A. Widtsoe, Stephen L. Richards. Bonus fact: Roughly 50 years after this photo was taken, Zina's grand-niece (my mother) would marry Joseph Alexander Rees's great-grandson (my father).
- Photo on right (L-R): Hannah Rees, Matt Rees (great-great-great granddaughter and great-great grandson, respectively, of Joseph Alexander and Amelia Hessel Rees)

Below are some brief profiles of Joseph's professional associates shown in the photo above:



Royal Joseph Murdock: Utah County Commissioner for 8 years, president of Utah Valley Hospital, Utah County Democratic Chairman, president of Provo Building and Loan Society for 13 years, member of Provo Kiwanis Club, president of Utah Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Secretary – Treasurer of Provo Reservoir and Utah Lake Irrigation Company for 46 years. (R.J. Murdock, Noted Community Leader, Dies)



Lafayette Holbrook: Served a mission in New Zealand 1897 – 1900. He and his wife (posthumously) were awarded the BYU Joseph F. Smith Family Living Award. Associated with Jesse Knight family in the development of a large farming project at Raymond, Alberta, Canada. Affiliated with Inyo Gold Mining Co., Park Mining Co., Ibex Gold Mining. (L. Holbrook, Y. Booster, Dies at 92)



Franklin S. Harris: president of BYU 1921-1945, PhD in Agronomy from Cornell University. Head of the Experiment Station at Utah State Agricultural College (now Utah State University). (Merrill)



Susa Young Gates: Well-known writer (Pioneer On Air). Active in womens' suffrage (Stevenson). First female music instructor at Brigham Young University (Memory Service Held in Honor of Susa Young Gates). Her daughter Leah (by her first husband), was the wife of John A. Widtsoe.



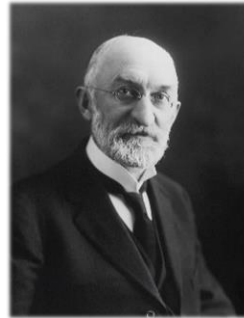
George H. Brimhall: President of Brigham Young University from 1903 – 1921. President of Utah State Teachers Association. Superintendent of Spanish Fork schools. Member of Spanish Fork City Council. Served on general LDS Church Board of Education, church board of examiners, general board of religion classes, general board of Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association. Served as stake superintendent of Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association and high councilor for Utah Stake. Chairman of Court of Honor of Timpanogos Boy Scout Council, recipient of Silver Beaver award from Boy Scouts of America. (Former Head of B.Y.U. Found Dead at Home)



Zina Presendia Young Card: In 1879 became Dean of Women at Brigham Young Academy; Known as the “First Lady of Cardston”; with her husband Charles Ora Card, settled Cardston, Alberta, Canada. Internationally-recognized leader of the Womens’ Suffrage movement, toured the eastern US as an ambassador for her religious beliefs and womens’ rights. Appointed to BYU Board of Trustees in 1918. Served as a member of the Primary General Board of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for 15 years. Dean of Women at LDS Business School. Served as a member of the Primary General Board of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for 15 years. (Zina Presendia Young Williams Card)



Joseph Fielding Smith: 10th president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Served a mission to Great Britain. Member of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. President of Utah Genealogical Society (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)



Heber J. Grant: 7th President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Instituted the church’s welfare program. First president of church’s Japan mission, and also presided over British and European missions. Served among Native American Indians and served 2 missions among the Yaqui in Mexico. Helped develop The Avenues neighborhood in SLC. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)



James E. Talmage: President of University of Utah from 1894 – 1897. Member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Chemist, geologist, PhD from Illinois Wesleyan University, fellow of the Royal Microscopical Society, (London), the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (Edinburgh), the Geological Society (London), the Geological Society of America, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Associate of the Philosophical Society of Great Britain, or Victoria Institute. Professor of geology at University of Utah for 10 years. (United Press)



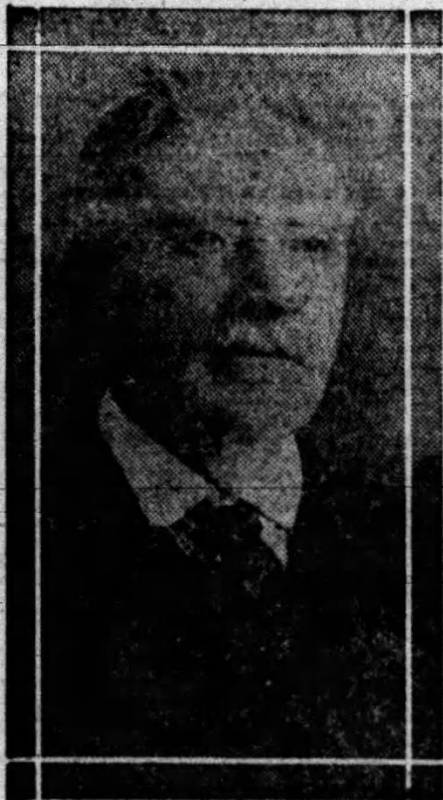
John A. Widtsoe: President of University of Utah for 5 years. Graduated with honors from Harvard in 1894, PhD from University of Gottingen, Germany. Founding father of BYU’s College of Biology and Agriculture. Oversaw restructuring of Federal Bureau of Reclamation. Served as member of Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also served as Church Commissioner of Education. (Wikipedia)



Stephen L. Richards: Member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. J.D. from University of Chicago. Member of the law faculty at University of Utah. Principal of Malad City, Idaho public schools. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

TRIBUTES ARE PAID TO THE MEMORY OF PIONEER EDUCATOR

JOSEPH A. REES.



Special to The Tribune.

SPANISH FORK, March 25.—The public schools of Spanish Fork closed at noon yesterday during the funeral services of Joseph A. Rees, pioneer teacher of Spanish Fork schools, for whom one of the new local elementary schools is named. The body of Mr. Rees was brought here from Santaquin, where services had previously been held, and many friends from that city accompanied the bier.

Educators from all over Utah paid tribute at the funeral, which was held in the City pavilion. Bishop George W. LeBaron of Santaquin conducted the services and made the closing remarks. Members of the choirs of the four wards of Spanish Fork furnished music. The invocation was offered by President Joseph Reece of the Nebo stake of Payson. The speakers were Dr. George H. Brimhall of Provo, Heber C. Jex, former Senator William N. Williams and J. Lewis of Salt Lake. Supervisor L. John Nuttall of the Nebo school district, Dr. Joseph Hughes and Mrs. Edna Brockbank, the latter representing the women pupils who were trained by Mr. Rees.

Musical numbers were given by members of the Nebo male chorus, comprising William Holt and company. A solo was given by John James of Salt Lake, a duet by the Jameson sisters, and a solo by Miss Ellen Jameson. The benediction was pronounced by Thomas Chatwin of Santaquin. The large pavilion was filled to its capacity.

Six former students of Mr. Rees were the pallbearers. Interment was in the Spanish Fork cemetery.

Tributes Paid to Pioneer Educator

Joseph died just a few years after the Board of Trustees photo was taken. The friends who spoke at his funeral were no less impressive in their standing in the community than were those with whom he associated professionally. A sampling of some of the speakers:



Heber C. Jex: Served a 3 ½ year mission in Australasia (New Zealand) mission from 1894-1897, then served a special mission for Mutual Improvement Association. Mayor of Spanish Fork, Utah. Instrumental in organizing Strawberry Valley Irrigation Project. President of an ad firm and the Jex Lumber Company. Served several years in Capitol Hill Ward bishopric. Helped organize Sons of Utah Pioneers. Special thanks to my coworker Robert Jex who, like his great-great uncle Heber Jex, is a leader and respected expert in his field, for this photo of Heber. (Heber C. Jex Obituary)



Edna Brockbank: President and board member of Spanish Fork Library 41 years. Served on the Utah County Board of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers for 10 years. Relief Society President for Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for 10 years, President of YWMIA of Palmyra Stake. Former student of Joseph Rees. (Daily Herald)



George W. LeBaron: Served 2 terms in State legislature 1929-1931. Cattleman, farmer, and merchant. Patriarch of Nebo Stake of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (George Washington LeBaron I)



L. John Nuttall: Appointed principal of a school in Pleasant Grove, Utah in 1906, when he was just 19. Teacher at Payson High School 1912 – 1915. Principal of Spanish Fork High School 1915 – 1916. Superintendent of Nebo School District, 1919 – 1922. PhD from Columbia University. Acting president of Brigham Young University in 1926-1927. Superintendent of Salt Lake City School District 1932 – 1944. (DBpedia)

Thinking and Acting Strictly Right

Joseph indeed kept some impressive company. Throughout his life, he surrounded himself with friends and associates who uplifted and inspired, and who were actively engaged in good causes. But, it was not these lofty associations which he wished to define him. Rather, the reward he sought was the contented feeling that comes from “having thought and acted strictly right.”

Little, indeed, have I cared for the plaudits of men. These, I considered too unsubstantial, too vapory to be of aught but transitory value. I would not have it inferred, however, that I underestimated the approbation of the servants of God for deeds I truly deserved. Such I much appreciated. After all, the conscious knowledge of having thought and acted strictly right is the pinnacle of reward; with this the soul rests content. (Rees)

A good reminder from one of our common ancestors that while the praise of the world is fleeting, the contented feeling that comes from thinking and acting with integrity is the “pinnacle of reward.” Happy Rees Pioneer Day!

Love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Amos".

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