



Jane Manning James

Jane Elizabeth Manning James

May 11, 1813 – April 16, 1908

Jane Elizabeth Manning James was born in Wilton, Connecticut, to Isaac Manning and Eliza Phyllis Mead. The Manning's were a free family living in rural Connecticut, and Jane had at least five siblings. At the age of six, Jane was sent away to live with the Fitches, a wealthy Caucasian family. She was raised by the Fitches' daughter and lived with them for the next thirty years. Little is known about Jane's life with the Fitches other than she worked as a servant: cooking, cleaning, and ironing. While she was with the Fitches, Jane was also brought up as a Christian. She was baptized into the Presbyterian Church when she was about 14 years old. On March 1, 1835, Jane gave birth to a son, Sylvester.

In the fall of 1842, two LDS missionaries, one of whom was Charles Wesley Wandell, were preaching in the area. Although it was forbidden by her Presbyterian preacher, Jane recorded that she had a desire to hear them. She went to hear them and was fully convinced that it was the true Gospel. Jane was baptized into the Latter Day Saints Church within one week, and later acquainted many friends and family member with her new beliefs as well. A year later, Jane and eight other members of her family, decided to move from their home in Wilton to Nauvoo, Illinois, in order to live among other members of their new faith. The group of nine began their journey with other Latter Day Saints under the direction of Wandell, but got separated from the group at Buffalo, New York when they couldn't afford to pay the train fare from New York to Ohio. Jane and her family traveled the remainder of their journey (approximately 800 miles) on foot. They walked until their shoes were worn out, and their feet became sore and cracked open and bled. When Jane and her family arrived in Nauvoo, they were welcomed by Joseph Smith himself. Over the next year Jane's family would establish their own homes. But Jane lived with the Joseph Smith family in Nauvoo until Smith's assassination in 1844.

Jane had several experiences while living with the Smith family in Nauvoo. As she went about doing the washing and cleaning for the Smiths, Emma (Joseph's wife) or Lucy (Joseph's mother) would stop her and talk with her. Emma asked her if she would like to be adopted by and sealed to her and Joseph. Jane had told her no, as she did not understand what that meant, if she would have she would have taken them up on their offer.

After Joseph Smith's assassination in 1844, Jane resided in Brigham Young's home. It was here where she met and married her husband, Isaac James. Isaac was also born a free man and grew up in rural New Jersey. He converted to the LDS church in 1839.

When the Latter Day Saints began to migrate west in 1846. Her immediate family members including her mother, brothers and sisters chose not to move west. Jane being pregnant, her husband Isaac, and son Sylvester were part of the original group to spend the winter of 1846 – 1847 at Winter Quarters, Nebraska. They were also part of the Ira Eldredge Company, the first Mormon pioneer company to enter the Salt Lake Valley in September 1847. When they settled in the Salt Lake Valley, they made up a third of 12 African-Americans living in Utah, and were the only ones who were free.

Jane was the first documented African-American woman to come to the Utah Territory as a Mormon pioneer. The James family's first years in the valley were very difficult: they lived in poverty. Jane exhibited remarkable charity and strength of character. Jane's life in Utah was punctuated by moments of joy. A daughter, Mary Ann was born in 1848, she was the first black child born in Utah. In the mid 1860's things got better for the family. They were able to build a home and acquired farmland and animals. The family began growing and Jane and Isaac had six children.

In 1869 Isaac James left the family after selling most of the family's realty to his wife. There is no evidence that Isaac had any permanent relations with any members of the family again. Within four years Jane was remarried to her son Sylvester's father-in-law, Frank Perkins. The marriage lasted less than two years, which at that time she reverted to her former married name. After the marriage Jane became worried about her eternal welfare. She began to petition the First Presidency to be endowed and to be sealed, along with her children to Walker Lewis, a prominent African-American Mormon Elder. Lewis like Elijah Abel had been ordained to the priesthood during Joseph Smith's lifetime, and Jane assumed that he would be eligible for temple ordinances, but her petitions were consistently ignored or refused.

Despite the trials, Jane never renounced her faith or gave up hope that one day she would have the blessings she desired. She struggled to care for the remaining children at home as a single parent. She sold the family farm and moved closer to the city in order to save money. During these years Jane both managed a household of children and small grandchildren, and also worked as a domestic servant in order to make ends meet. Jane remained active in the church, she participated in the Relief Society doing extensive charitable work. She also contributed financially to the building of the Logan, Manti, and St. George temples; temples as an African-American she was not allowed to enter. The members of her congregation did recognize her faith and sacrifice. In her later life, she received a reserved seat near the front and center of the Utah Tabernacle for church services.

On April 16, 1908 Jane Elizabeth Manning James died in Salt Lake City, Utah and was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. Her grave location is **Plat – A, Block – 11, Lot – 8, Grave – 4, Tier – E.**