

Alpheus Cutler: Temple Builder, Founder of Cutler's Park, Schismatic

by G. Vaughn Johnson

Alpheus Cutler was born 29 February 1784 in Plainfield, Sullivan County, New Hampshire. He was the eldest son of Knight and Elizabeth Boyd Cutler. His father was a veteran of the Revolutionary War and fought in the battle of Saratoga in which the Continental Army defeated the British. After his marriage, Alpheus fought in battles of Chippewa Falls and Lundy Lane near Niagara Falls in the War of 1812.¹

Alpheus married Lois Lathrop of Lebanon, Grafton County, New Hampshire. Lois was the daughter of Captain Samuel and Lois Huntington Lathrop. The Lathrop's were a prominent Lebanon, New Hampshire family. Lois was 20 years old at the time of her marriage. Soon after their marriage they moved to Upper Lisle, Broome County, New York where Alpheus' parents had moved. Three of their children were born in this area, Thaddeus (1809), Lois (1811) and Libbeus (1814).²

Shortly after the War of 1812 the Cutlers moved to western New York locating in Chautauqua County near Lake Erie. Here most of their remaining children were born. Daisy Whiting Fletcher shows 7 additional children³ and Jorgenson shows 9 additional children. Jorgenson shows two additional younger children, Betsy A. (1832) and Phineas (unknown).⁴ Mildred Hunter McBeth states that the the eldest four children were born in Broome County, New York and that William Lathrop was born in Ontario County, New York.⁵ McBeth agrees with the addition of Betsy A. but does not show Phineas as a child.⁶

While living in western New York the Cutlers came in contact with David Patton, a Mormon missionary around 1832. Following a meeting in the Cutler home, their daughter, Lois, who was critically ill, requested a healing administration. Immediately afterwards she arose from her bed, dressed and walked around declaring that she had been 'healed by the power of God'.⁷ Alpheus and his family joined the church on 20 January 1833. The new converts became part of the Silver Creek Branch of the church.⁸

The Cutlers moved to Kirtland, Ohio during the summer of 1833. Alpheus used his skill as a mason to assist in the construction of the Kirtland Temple. Alpheus attended the School of the Prophets a priesthood study group organized by Joseph Smith. He possessed a prodigious memory and was noted for his memorization of the prophet's lectures on faith and much of the Doctrine and Covenants.⁹

The Cutlers moved to Missouri in late 1836 or early 1837. They farmed along the Crooked River in Northern Ray County. As a result of violence against the Mormons on 27 October 1838, the Cutlers lost their farms and crops in Missouri. They settled in Commerce, Illinois (later renamed Nauvoo) selected homesites and established farms in the area.¹⁰

¹ Daisy Whiting Fletcher, "Alpheus Cutler and The Church of Jesus Christ", February 23, 1970, pp. 1-2.

² Danny L. Jorgenson, "The Old Fox: Alpheus Cutler", Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History, ed. Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), p. 159.

³ Fletcher, op. cit., p. 2..

⁴ Jorgenson, op.cit., p. 159.

⁵ Mildred Hunter McBeth, "Alpheus Cutler: 1784-1864", p. 3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jorgenson, op. cit., p. 160.

⁸ Fletcher, op. cit., p. 3.

⁹ Jorgenson, op. cit., p. 160.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 161.

At the Semiannual Conference in October 1839, Alpheus became a member of the Nauvoo Stake High Council and later a member of the Nauvoo Temple construction committee. In September of 1841 a group of Mormons under the leadership of Alpheus Cutler and Peter Haws left Nauvoo to obtain timber in the pine country of Wisconsin. A large raft of boards and timber was floated down the Mississippi River and arrived in Nauvoo in October of 1842.¹¹

Cutler was appointed a member of the Council of Fifty, an organization that provided a pattern of political government under the direction of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. The council was given two major responsibilities, The organization of Joseph Smith's presidential campaign of 1844 and the exodus from Nauvoo in 1845-46.¹²

Cutler was intimately involved in the construction of the Nauvoo Temple, distributing tools, materials and supplies to the workmen. He rang a bell which called the workers to their posts at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day to release them from their labors. As the temple construction proceeded conditions in Nauvoo had deteriorated. It became difficult to distinguish friend from foe and truth from error. Construction on the temple lagged. This confusion reached its apex on 27th of June 1844 when Joseph Smith and his brother, Hiram, were killed in Carthage, Illinois.¹³

The church went through a period of turmoil and uncertainty. The Twelve which had been away from Nauvoo, assumed responsibility for the church when they returned. Alpheus Cutler acknowledged their leadership. Brigham Young and the Twelve established two primary goals the completion of the Temple and the exodus to the west.

By the time of Joseph Smith's death the Quorum of the Twelve and many of the Council of Fifty were practicing celestial and plural marriage, the most distinctive feature of Temple Mormonism.¹⁴ Alpheus and Lois Cutler were sealed in the temple on 14 January 1846. With the consent of Lois he was sealed to Luana Hart Beebe on the same day. On 3 February 1846 he was sealed to five more wives in temple ceremonies: Margaret Carr, and her sister, Abigail, Sally Cox, Daisey Caroline McCall, and Henrietta Clarinda Miller.¹⁵

Alpheus' two daughters, Clarissa and Emily married Heber C. Kimball as plural wives. From these two unions two boys were born, Abraham and Isaac Kimball. Clarissa and Emily did not go west with their husband, Heber Kimball. Both women subsequently repudiated their marriages and married Cutlerite men. Abraham and Isaac grew up among the Cutlerites residing in their grandfather's home. Both were reunited with their father in Utah during their early teens.¹⁶

Alpheus left Nauvoo in February 1846 and reached the Missouri River on 12 June 1846. On the other side he founded Nebraska's first city, Cutler's Park. Cutler's Park was to be only a temporary encampment and Brigham Young appointed Alpheus to help select the site of Winter Quarters. In August of 1846 Alpheus was sustained as the president of the Municipal High Council at Winter Quarters.

In response to pressure from the Indian Agent in Nebraska the Mormons abandoned Winter Quarters in 1848. Alpheus moved across the Missouri River to Silver Creek in what was to become Mills County, Iowa. Cutler became President of the Silver Creek Branch. Brigham

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kenneth W. Godfrey, "The Council of Fifty", Selections From the Encyclopedia of Mormonism: Church History, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company), pp. 71-73.

¹³ Fletcher, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁴ Jorgenson, op. cit., p. 162.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 162-163.

Young wrote him a letter on 21 April 1848 encouraging him to come west. Cutler wrote back that he would start as soon as ‘circumstances will permit’.¹⁷

“[Cutler] found it difficult to follow the emerging church leadership. He and other members of the Council of Fifty, Lyman Wight, Bishop George Miller and James Emmett, felt their council should still be sought on decisions for the church. They felt Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve were taking unauthorized control and edging them out of their rightful positions. Each of them would eventually lead people from the church.”¹⁸

Increasing friction with the Kanessville High Council and the presiding church authority in the area, Orson Hyde, led to several meetings to resolve their differences. Cutler felt that he had a mandate from Joseph Smith to preach the gospel to the Indians. He felt the focus on moving to Utah was misplaced. He was eventually excommunicated on 20 April 1851. The Branch in Silver Creek with some exceptions became followers of Cutler.

In late 1851 a law was passed in Mills County that made polygamy illegal. Alpheus Cutler renounced his plural Marriages. We know very little of the fate of these women. One of them, Luana Hart Beebe remained with the Cutlerites although she later emigrated to Utah and died there in 1897. Luana had three children while married to Alpheus, Jacob Lorenzo (1846), Olive Luana (1850) and Lydia Ann (unknown). The paternity of these children was kept secret and other surnames were used for the children.¹⁹ Apparently Lydia Ann died in early childhood as she was not living with her mother on the 1860 Census. Another wife, Sally Cox, went west with the Ezra Taft Benson Company. She died in Salt Lake City in 1863.

Two of Alpheus Cutler’s children also went west with the main body of the church. William Lathrop Cutler died in Salt Lake City in 1851. Louisa Elizabetha Cutler had married Tunis Rappleye and they had ten children. Louisa died in Lehi, Utah County Utah in 1854.

In 1853 Alpheus moved his followers to Manti, Fremont County, Iowa. Shortly afterwards he organized the True Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. He did not claim to be a Prophet, Seer and Revelator or a successor to Joseph Smith but was the President of the High Priesthood. The theology of the Cutlerites endorsed Joseph Smith, the Bible, the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. According to Jorgenson it reflected an entirely conventional Nauvoo Mormonism²⁰. Unlike other schismatic movements it preserved a form of temple rites.²¹

By the late 1850s the Cutlerites had grown to more than 500 members in southwestern Iowa. The Cutlerites were approached by Zenos H. Gurley representing what became the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ. Cutler and his followers rejected Gurley’s attempt to find common ground asserting their superior claims to Mormon succession.²²

The Reorganized Church continued to proselyte among the Cutlerites and had considerable success. Included in this list of converts was Thaddeus Cutler, Alpheus’ son and designated successor.²³

Cutler’s health began to fail and shortly before his death he had a vision that the church should move north between the lakes. The church moved to Clitherall, Otter Tail County, Minnesota. The headquarters of the church remained there until 1928 when it was moved to Independence, Missouri. Today it has but one branch in Independence, Missouri.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 164.

¹⁸ Barbara B. Robertson, ”Choices: Alpheus Cutler and the Elisha Whiting Family” (1998) Unpublished manuscript, p. 18.

¹⁹ Jorgenson, op.cit., p. 162.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 170.

²¹ Robertson, op.cit., p. 22.

²² Jorgenson, op. cit., p. 172.

²³ Ibid.