

AUSTIN COWLES

Timothy Cowles (pronounced "Coals") and Abigail Woodworth were the parents of Austin Cowles, born 3 May 1792 in Brookfield, Orange, Vermont.

"At an early age he had the misfortune to lose one of his eyes, accidentally put out by an arrow shot by one of his brothers. Born at an age when free schools were almost or quite unknown where his parents resided, and at a time and place where a livelihood was hard to get, and being one of a large family, it took a determined spirit to surmount the difficulties before him but he proved equal to the task. At an early age he became a teacher, began preaching at the age of 21, and was a regularly ordained minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1819, he removed from Unadilla, Otsego, New York, to Friendship, New York, and thence to Bolivar, New York in February 1820, where he and his brother Asa built and occupied a house together until 1821. He was part owner of a saw mill built there. The first religious services in the town were held by him in 1820, a barn being used for lack of a church. The first school house was built in 1820, and he taught the winter term of 1820-21. In 1825, he was Inspector of Common Schools and a Town Clerk. He was a wheelwright and small farmer and part of the time was engaged as a circuit preacher. About 1828, he became afflicted with a disease affecting the bones of his feet, caused as he thought, by wearing tight shoes, from which he suffered the remainder of his life. Soon after the advent of the Mormon church he became a fervent believer in the Mormon doctrine and was ordained a minister [Elder] of the Mormon church in New York State; removed about 1837 to Kirtland, Ohio, the seat of the Mormon church, and then in 1838 to Nauvoo, Illinois."

Phebe Wilbur, daughter of Thomas and Anna Wood Wilbur, married Austin on 14 January 1813 in Unadilla, Otsego, New York. Phoebe was born 6 Oct 1785 in Otsego County, New York. They became the parents of eight children, all born in New York., The last child was born in November 1825, and Phoebe, died on 1 May 1826. She had been preceded in death by three of their children, Sophia, Alonzo, and Leonard. The fifth child, Mary Ann (our direct ancestor) married Rosel Hyde in 1839 in Payson, Adams, Illinois

On 21 October 1827, Austin married Irena H. Elliott and they became the parents of six children. Austin was baptized a member of The Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1832. As was the custom in the early days of the Church, the members desired to unite with the main body of the Church, which at this time was in Kirtland, Ohio. Austin and his family moved there about 1837, then on to Nauvoo, Illinois in 1838 where they were members of the Nauvoo 4th Ward.

On the 6th of February 1841 Austin was called to serve on the High Council. The following month he became a Counselor to William Marks in the Stake Presidency. He served a mission in 1841 to Massachusetts and New Hampshire. At Gilsum, New Hampshire, Austin and his companion organized the Gilsum Branch of the Church. With his Church service, Austin was at the time close to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Once when Joseph was talking about revelations he had received which he dared not reveal, "even to Father Cowles". Joseph was referring to the faithfulness of Austin.

A block map of Nauvoo in 1842 shows that Austin was a merchant, and owned a store on Main Street, near Kimball Street. He also was the Supervisor of Streets.

When the Doctrine of Plural Marriage was revealed, Austin was strongly opposed and sided with William Law and other dissenters against Joseph Smith. He wrote an affidavit against plural marriage that appeared in the first, and only, edition of *The Nauvoo Expositor* on 7 June 1844. This article enraged many of the citizens who then destroyed the press. Many feel that this was the turning point that led to the murder of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. The public opposition to the revealed doctrine of the Prophet led to the excommunication of Austin, along with others. He withdrew from his office and went with his family to Burlington, Iowa, then later to Hampton Illinois where he wrote the following letter to Heman Hyde, friend, and father-in-law of Austin's daughter Mary Ann:

"August 16, 1844

Respected Brother: Having an opportunity to write. . . I gladly improve it, to let you know that our lives and health through the divine care of our [H]eavenly Father is yet continued unto us, and I hope you and all our relatives and friends in your country enjoy the like blessing. We first landed at Burlington, (Iowa) where we staid one month to look out a location that would please us and our friends that would think it good to live with us and selected the place where we now dwell which with the surrounding country for

20 miles is thought by those that follow the river to be the best region of country between New Orleans and St. Peters, (Minnesota), and is undoubtedly so, all advantages considered, the water power and health of the climate. We are told that there has been but four deaths in six years in this town. For ourselves, we are well satisfied. So much for our temporal things. We have all purchased lands to our liking and we rejoice exceedingly that (though at much sacrifice) we have escaped from a city where abomination reigns and its votaries are hastening to destruction. Notwithstanding we are accused as the murderers of the Prophet and Patriarch, we know that we are as innocent as were the prophets of old that stood up to tell the rulers of their wickedness and call on them to repent and return to the law that they might live. The manner of deaths of the Prophet and Patriarch was as horrible to us as to any other ones. I had fear that the abuse many received from their tongues would cause their death by the hands of some dark midnight assassin. But I had not thought that an organized mob would in violation of all law, have taken their lives, when prisoners to the administration of law; but the event I leave in the hands of God who suffered it thus to be. I was well aware that that people were destined to feel the rod, but little did I think it would be in that manner. But what is the issue? I am told that the Twelve take the government of the Church and have decreed to carry out the course as commenced by Joseph in his doctrines and measured as he left them. I have written my views to Elder (William) Marks on that matter, and I now say to you that if the history of Jackson County, Kirtland, Clay, Caldwell has not taught the virtuous wisdom, than follow still a government whose head, Brigham Young, has in a public speech in Nauvoo commended the man as having done a noble deed in his attempt to assassinate ex Governor Boggs, follow in this course of thing and in two years no Mormon lives in Nauvoo. The [B]ook of Mormon says that those who keep the commandments of God shall prosper in this the land of Joseph, and I defy any men to make it appear by any revelation that has been given to us that we should ever have been driven from any land, had we kept his law, and my counsel to all my children and friends is to dispose of their effects and leave Nauvoo, for I say unto you that though you were as righteous as Noah, Daniel or Job you cannot save that people from the necessity of leaving Nauvoo or going where Joseph and Hyrum are [have] gone. My pecuniary affairs in that region I wish you could see to my lots in Nauvoo if you can get offers for them at thirty-five dollars, twenty in cash and fifteen in good property each, take it. Tell Bro. Bailey near where I lived, to sell my lands in Iowa, if he can get three-fourths what they cost me. Give my love to all enquiring friends; tell all my children the voice of an affectionate father is

to leave that sickly country and locate where you will be truly pleased. Remember your father has never guessed wrong as yet concerning the Church. I wish, Bro. Hyde, that you would see Elder Marks and both come up and see the country, stay a week and you will make it your homes. I am told that Bro. Marks has resigned his office; this is wisdom. Give my love to him and his family, especially. Yours, affectionately,
Austin Cowles”

He later moved back to Kirtland. In 1850 he moved to Sycamore, Illinois where he remained a few months and then moved to Fulton City, Illinois where he kept a grocery store for some years. . At some point, he was affiliated with The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In 1854 he moved to Decatur County, Iowa. “The journey occupied some weeks as he used two yoke of oxen for a team and drove several young cattle. He was accompanied by his wife and three youngest children and a neighbor by the name of Booth, and his family. They landed near Pleasanton, Decatur, Iowa, in May or June, 1854. The country was new and lumber hard to get, so he with the help of his eldest son, then with him, erected a log house that was their home for many years. He farmed and operated a grist- and sawmill. He preempted government land at \$1.25 per acre, and though neighbors were scarce for years, and the family had to endure many hardships, they felt secure in their home. He held to the first principles of the Mormon religion and taught them in the pulpit, and in the last years of his life investigated [S]piritualism and believed in it. After a long life spent in making the world better, an example to all who knew him, and with charity for all and malice towards none, his tall form was laid at rest on the old homestead, with his wife, Irena by his side. Two simple marble slabs mark their resting places. These verses are cut in the marble: ‘He chose virtue as his sweetest guide, Lived as a Christian, as a Christian died.’” He died 15 December 1872, at the age of 80.

Sources:

Family Group Sheets, compiled by the Hyde Family Organization
Early Church Membership Records, Salt Lake City Family History Library
Genealogy of the Cowles Families in America, by Calvin D. Cowles, 1929