

Heman Hyde and Polly Wyman Tilton

At the time of Heman Hyde's birth on 30 June 1788, his parents, James and Betty (Pennock) Hyde, were living at Manchester, in southern Vermont, but while he was still a baby they moved to Strafford, in the northern part of the state. Heman was raised there, being the oldest of a large family of brothers and sisters. Indications are that Heman received a fair amount of schooling as he grew up.

On the fifth day of December, in 1810, Heman married Polly Wyman Tilton, a girl he had known ever since he could remember. Polly was the daughter of Phillip Tilton and Tabitha Prescott, an Indian woman, and was born 20 January 1786, in Moultonborough, New Hampshire. While Polly was still a small child her mother moved to Strafford, Vermont, and there married a widower, John Bullock. To this union were born seven children, half brothers and sisters of Polly.

The first child of this marriage, Heman Tilton Hyde, was born in Strafford in June 1812. Sometime during the next two and a half years the young father departed from his happy home to serve in the war of 1812, and also moved his family to York, Livingston Co., New York. In York, four more children were born: Charles Walker (named after a family friend), July 1814; Rosel (named by his uncle, Roswell Hyde, who purposely abbreviated the name), May 1816; William, September 1818; and Mary Ann, September 1820.

Records show Heman to have been in the New York State Militia. From the *Military Minutes of the Council of Appointment of the State of New York*, 1783-1821, vol. 3, pp 1929, 2042, by Hugh Hastings:

24 April 1818. Genesee Co. 164th Regiment of Infantry,
New York State Militia. Heman Hyde, Lieut.

27 March 1819. Genesee Co. 77th Regiment of Infantry
New York State Militia. Heman Hyde, Capt.

In the year 1825, Heman and Polly, with their children, left York and settled in Freedom, Cattaraugus Co., New York. Since that was wilderness, Heman cleared the timber from the land and developed a large farm. He also carried on a heavy business in wool carding and cloth dressing. He was well situated and much respected by all. Their house was ever a home to the weary and their hands never withheld from the poor. In May 1827, another daughter was born, Caroline, but she was not destined for adulthood in this life, and died the same day.

Adjoining the family farm was the farm of Warren A. Cowdery, an early convert to "Mormonism," and it was from him, during the early 1830's that the Hyde family first heard of the restored Gospel and learned of the *Book of Mormon*. Warren obtained from his brother Oliver, some of the proof sheets to the *Book of Mormon*, some of which the Hyde family "had the privilege of perusing, and we did not peruse any faster than we believed."

Heman's son William records in his journal that "early in the year 1834 Joseph Smith and Parley P. Pratt came to my father's house. They preached in the neighborhood two or three times, and conversed much in private. Before they left, my oldest brother was baptized."

The Prophet Joseph Smith, in his journal, says of the occasion:

"Sunday, March 9th.--We preached in a school house, and had great attention. We found a few disciples who were firm in the faith; and, after meeting found many believing and could hardly get away from them, and appointed a meeting in Freedom for Monday the 10th, and stayed at Mr. Warren A. Cowdery's, where we were blessed with a full enjoyment of temporal and spiritual blessings . . .

"Monday 10.--We met our appointment, and preached to a great congregation; and at evening again preached to an overflowing house. After meeting, I proposed if any wished to obey, and would make it manifest, we would stay to administer to another meeting. A young man of the Methodist order arose and testified of his faith in the fullness of the Gospel and desired to be baptized. We appointed another meeting for the following day.

"Tuesday 11.--Fulfilled our appointment and baptized Heman T. Hyde, after which we rode nine miles"

This Heman T. Hyde whom they baptized was the son of Heman and Polly. Of this incident Elder Parley P. Pratt, who was the Prophet's traveling companion on this mission, says,

“We visited Freedom, Cattaraugus County, New York; tarried over Sunday and preached several discourses, to which the people listened with great interest; we were kindly and hospitably entertained among them. We baptized a young man named Heman Hyde; his parents were Presbyterians, and his mother, on account of the strength of her traditions, thought that we were wrong, and told me afterwards that she would much rather have followed him to an earthly grave than to have seen him baptized. Soon afterwards, however, herself, her husband, and the rest of the family, with some thirty or forty others, were all baptized and organized into a branch of the Church--called the Freedom Branch--from which nucleus the light spread and souls were gathered into the fold in all regions round. Thus mightily grew the word of God, or the seed sown by that extraordinary personage, the Prophet and Seer of the nineteenth century”.

The following is the story of Polly's conversion, as related by George Tilton Hyde, who said that his father, Rosel (son of Polly), told it to him more than once. Rosel said that the Prophet Joseph Smith was visiting at their home in Freedom, New York, and told them the thrilling story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. “Mother said to him, ‘Mr. Smith, if what you say is not true, hell is too good a place for you.’ The Prophet replied, ‘I know it, Mrs. Hyde, I know it; but the testimony I have borne to you is true; I know it is true and you may know it.’ The words of the Prophet cut her to the heart, and before retiring that night she sought the Lord in humble prayer--her petition was answered--the next morning she applied for baptism.”

The journal of Orson Pratt states that he and Brother John Murdock were at Mr. Hyde's home on March 30, 1834. On April 7, Heman Hyde and William Hyde, among others, were baptized and confirmed. On April 11, Polly Hyde was baptized and confirmed. Other members of the family soon followed their example, except for Rosel (“because of a sort of shyness on my part, being at that time but a young man and never having joined myself to any religious body.”) Heman was ordained an Elder not long after his baptism.

From the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt (p. 121) we glean the following added information:

As I returned toward the West, I came to the town of Freedom . . . where President Joseph Smith and myself had preached on our outward journey, a few weeks previously, and where we had baptized a young man by the name of Heman Hyde, as the first fruits in that place . . . Heman Hyde accompanied me to Kirtland, where we arrived the latter part of April, and were kindly and hospitably entertained by President Joseph Smith.

In May of the same year Heman Tilton Hyde was one of about two hundred volunteers who went with the Prophet Joseph Smith in the great march called "Zion's Camp," to Missouri to aid the persecuted saints there, returning in July or August.

Heman Hyde and those of his household, were fully convinced of the truthfulness of the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and as time passed their testimonies burned stronger and stronger. In February of the year 1836 the family (including young Heman Tilton Hyde with his bride, Eunice Sawyer, whom he had married in October 1835) moved from Freedom, New York, to Kirtland, Ohio, at that time one of the gathering places of the Church, and the site of the first temple being built by the saints. Construction was nearly complete on the temple by the time the Hyde family made residence in Kirtland, and it was dedicated a month later. The family attended the dedication of the temple, except for the son Rosel, who still had not been baptized. William Hyde, in his journal, says of the dedication meeting: "This was, by far, the best meeting I had ever attended. The gifts of the gospel were enjoyed in a marvelous manner and Angels administered unto many." The people outside the temple heard a strange noise like the rushing of a strong wind and they beheld a bright light resting above the sacred building." In later years when George Hyde asked his father Rosel why he delayed asking for baptism, Rosel said that his father told him not to be in a hurry, but to wait until he was sure it was the right thing to do. Rosel told George further, that the evening of the dedication of the temple at Kirtland, Ohio, from his father's home on the farm near Kirtland, that he saw a bright light like a pillar of fire resting above the temple. After what he saw and also heard at that time he needed nothing more to convince him and soon after, he was baptized.

The attributes and abilities of Heman Hyde were noticed by the Church leaders, and in 1837 he was ordained a High Priest, that he might more ably fill the capacities for which he was suited. Polly supported him fully, and did all in her power to assist in the strengthening of the Church.

The Saints were commanded to gather in and about Independence, Missouri, but they were meeting with opposition from the other settlers. Heman Hyde's son William, traveled to Far West, Missouri, the route he had to travel being a journey of about 1800 miles, and arrived in the spring of 1838. He did what he could to help the Saints there in their trials and persecution. The rest of the family of Heman and Polly left Kirtland in September of the same year, intending to go to Far West and settle. When they had traveled as far as Huntsville, Missouri, about one hundred miles into the state and almost to their destination, they remained a few days in the woods where they were discovered by a mob, and for no other reason than that they were "Mormons," were compelled by the armed mob to leave the state. They retreated to Quincy, Illinois. William Hyde was among those driven out of Far West in December, 1838, and he also fled to Quincy, where William found his parents.

Three more of their children married while Heman and Polly lived in the vicinity of Quincy -- Rosel in December 1839 to Mary Ann Cowles; Mary Ann in March 1841 to Isaac Bullard; and William in February 1842 to Elizabeth Howe Bullard, sister of Isaac. Charles undoubtedly desired also to marry, but was crippled and probably felt that he would never enjoy the companionship of a wife. But his parents were happy to have him, with his kind disposition, remain at home with them.

Heman Tilton Hyde died in May of 1842, not quite thirty years of age, leaving a widow and two small children, with another child born seven months after his decease. His death can be partly attributed to the persecutions and hardships which he had endured along with the rest of the Saints. His parents and family were greatly saddened by his death.

Heman and Polly, during the summer of 1842, moved into Nauvoo, Illinois. Here they, along with their son William, built a comfortable brick home for themselves. In October of this same year Mary Ann's husband died, a mournful occasion for this bride of eighteen months. She later married David Grant in September 1843.

The family was part of the dramatic events at Nauvoo. They enjoyed its growth and prosperity under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith, whom they knew well. (Their son Rosel commented many times about their friendship with the Prophet, and he made special mention of the Prophet's unusual eyes -- that to look into them was to know that he was not an ordinary man.) They grieved at the tragic martyrdom of their beloved Prophet. They were there when the mantle of Joseph fell upon Brigham Young. They worked diligently to help complete the temple at Nauvoo so that they and the other Saints could receive their temple ordinances. It was a time of rejoicing when these temple blessings were finally realized.

But the "anti-Mormon" presence was becoming more pronounced and more vicious. As Rosel told it, he and his family and friends "passed through those bitter scenes of persecution so well understood by those acquainted with the history of the Church. We suffered the most heart-rendering persecution that a cruel mob, actuated by the spirit of devils, could inflict upon us in the shape of burning houses, burning standing grain, etc." On the eighteenth of May 1846, Heman and Polly, with their children and their families, and what earthly possessions they could haul in their wagons, gazed for the last time on their comfortable homes, their beautiful city, and the Holy Temple, then crossed the Mississippi River, and started their long journey in search of peace in an unknown and desolate wilderness. The trail was by then well-worn, for the first fleeing Saints had left Nauvoo in the bitter cold and wet of February, followed by a steady migration. The Hyde families reached Council Bluffs the 12th of July. The two months had been hard and long, but others shared their plight and all buoyed each other's spirits.

Only four days after arriving at the Missouri River (Council Bluffs) William Hyde was mustered into the Mormon Battalion, leaving his wife and two children in the care of his parents in "this unsettled camp in the midst of an uncultivated, wild Indian country."

Heman settled at what was called Council Point and because of his wisdom and abilities, he was appointed to the High Council (21 July 1846) to help govern the camps of the Saints at this temporary place of gathering. Heman and Rosel built crude homes for themselves, for Eunice (widow of Heman Tilton Hyde) and her three children, and for William's family. They also cultivated land during the summer.

Fall came and Eunice's baby died. Rather than suffer further, she returned to her family home in Freedom, New York, taking her two remaining children with her. In February 1847, Mary Ann Hyde Grant died after a lingering sickness caused by exposure, as had many of the Saints in their inadequate circumstances. She left a husband and two children without their dear wife and mother. Heman and Polly then cared for their motherless grandchildren. The next summer Heman and Rosel toiled to raise all the crops they could, for the benefit of themselves and for all those that might have need of food as the winter season advanced.

In December 1847, William returned from his march with the Mormon Battalion, amid much rejoicing by all. He had been absent seventeen months. Spring arrived at last and preparations were made for Heman and household to travel on. William and Rosel assisted their father and mother, so that they, with their son Charles and also Mary Ann's children, were able to leave Council Bluffs with the Saints that spring for the Rocky Mountains. They arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in September 1848, and settled there. It had been an arduous and seemingly endless trek across the plains, during which journey Heman acted in the capacity of a Captain of Fifty. William worked the farm at Council Point that Heman and Rosel had opened, and Rosel hired to drive a team for the government. William, Rosel, and their families made the journey to "Zion" in 1849. Heman was able to secure land and build an adequate home. He felt grateful to the Lord for the blessings his household now enjoyed, after the diverse hardships they had undergone.

In 1851, Heman and Polly, after due consideration and prayer, decided to invite a friend to join them in the bonds of plural marriage. Consequently, a widow woman by the name of Prudence Bump, became Heman's second wife.

In February 1852, their son Charles married Sarah Taylor, and remained in Salt Lake City. Charles was the last child to leave the family home. Rosel was called to settle Kaysville. William lived in Lehi, then Cache Valley, where Hyde Park was named after him. These sons were all a wonderful credit to their parents through their example and teachings. All three of them became Patriarchs of the Church and as they lived their religion to the fullest, they were known for their spirituality and faith.

Sometime, probably during the 1850's a photographer opened either a permanent or a temporary studio in Salt Lake City. Heman and Polly dressed in their best (he in his uniform from the War of 1812), visited the photographer and posed for their pictures. What kindness, love and other emulative traits are recorded in their faces!

In 1856 Heman married a third wife, Elizabeth Lane, who had emigrated from Wales. Because of her fine character, she was loved by all of Heman's family. Three years later, a fourth wife, Catherine Mary Griffiths, became a member of Heman's household. She was thirty-four years old, and like Elizabeth, an emigrant from Wales. Imagine the delight in the heart and home of Heman Hyde, who was in his seventy's, when during the first three years after this marriage this wife presented him with two sons, Heman and Henry, and then the sorrow when both children died of scarlet fever in 1865.

Heman and Polly were ever considerate of others' needs, serving their Church, family and fellow-men in every way that they could. Heman was a member of the High Council for several years after his arrival in Salt Lake Valley. He and Polly, in addition to Heman's plural wives, made a home for their granddaughter, Mary Ann Grant, until her untimely death at the age of seventeen, after she caught cold while attending a party.

The wife and mother of this Hyde family, Polly Wyman Tilton Hyde, left this earthly existence on the thirteenth of September 1862. She was a woman of strong will, but gentle and kind, proud of her part-Indian ancestry, admired and loved by her family. She served well and devotedly, and when her sweet smile was missing from the family they greatly felt her absence.

Polly was united on the other side of the veil with her husband, Heman on 11 June 1869. He died in Salt Lake City, Utah, his home of twenty-one years. His strong, fervent testimony which carried him through his years of trials is a permanent legacy for those of us who are his descendants.

History written by Myrtle S. Hyde - 1964

Sources:

1. Patriarchal Blessings of Heman Hyde and Polly Tilton
2. Manchester, Vermont Deeds
3. Strafford, Vermont Vital Records
4. Records of Endowment House, Logan and Nauvoo Temples
5. Writings of George Tilton Hyde
6. Strafford, Vermont Census 1790, 1800

7. Hyde Family Records
8. York, New York Census 1820, 1825
9. Records of Charles Walker Hyde
10. *Descendants of Humphrey Hide*, by Willard S. Morse
11. Journal of William Hyde
12. *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*
13. Records of Rosel Hyde
14. Obituary of Heman Hyde
15. *History of the Church*, Vol II, pp 42,61,184,123,139,428
16. Early LDS Church Records File
17. *Exodus to Greatness*, by Preston Nibley p 206