

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN THE BRITISH ISLES

Part 6: Alexander Neibaur, Early Preston Saint

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Worldwide Saints would like to thank Peter Fagg of the Preston area for providing the content for this part in our series. Peter Fagg is the bishop of the Chorley Second Ward, situated on the Preston Temple site. He is a partner in two "Latter-day Book Stores" in England and is a registered Blue Badge tour guide. Bishop Fagg is currently working on a history of the Church in England, titled "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants." He and his wife Nicola are the proud parents of two girls. He can be contacted at peterf@btconnect.com.

In Part One of this series, mention was made of the Cock Pit, where the early Preston Saints held meetings. Just a few streets away from where this Cock Pit was located is a long, thin alleyway called Old Cock Yard. The Victorian houses that stood along this quiet alley have been replaced by tall, dark, modern warehouses, but beneath your feet you can still see the old cobblestones upon which the early missionaries and members once walked. It was along this yard that you would have found the home of two early converts: Alexander and Ellen Neibaur. These two names may not be familiar to you, but Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Hugh Nibley, and any well-versed Church chorister would recognize their contribution to the Church.

Dreamer of Golden Bibles and Angels

Alexander Neibaur was a Jew who had been converted to Christianity in Europe. He trained to be a dentist in Berlin (1823-26) and moved to Britain, where he met Ellen Breakell. In 1834, they were married in Chorley, the town where the Preston Temple is now located. They settled in Old Cock Yard, Preston, and it was in this home that Alexander had a dream about a golden Bible and an angel. The meaning of the dream eluded him, but one day he heard Ellen talking to a neighbor about some U.S. American missionaries preaching about angels and a new Bible. Alexander felt sure this was the answer to his unusual dream and tracked the Elders down. The interpretation of his dream soon became clear, and Alexander and Ellen were baptized in the River Ribble on 9 April 1838. Alexander was probably the first Jew to become a member of the restored gospel. They emigrated from Liverpool to Nauvoo in February 1841 on board the ship "Sheffield."

Dentist to the Prophets

Alexander's dentistry skills were in great demand in Nauvoo, where he advertised his practice in "The Times and Seasons" (the Nauvoo newspaper) and set up his office in Brigham Young's

home. They had met in Britain, and Alexander went on to become the dentist to Brigham's family and many other well-known church leaders, including Joseph Smith.

When Joseph Smith was attacked at the Johnson farm, the mob cracked his tooth while attempting to force him to swallow poison. Thereafter, Joseph had a slight whistle when he spoke. Alexander, as surgeon dentist, worked on Joseph's teeth and tried to correct that whistle.

Matchmaker

The Neibaurs were an enterprising couple and eager to find a steady income. They started the Nauvoo Match Factory, providing the Saints with a convenient way to start their fires.

Writer of Hymns

Alexander also dabbled in poetry, and one of his poems, "Down by the River's Verdant Side," was included in the 1950 hymnbook but excluded in the 1985 edition. Some articles claim that Alexander is also the author of the LDS hymn "Come thou Glorious Day of Promise," but this is inaccurate. Alexander was the original contributor of this hymn to the LDS hymnal, but he is not the author. Nonetheless, the Jewish imagery used reflects his unique heritage.

Tutor of the Prophet

Alexander knew seven different languages: English, French, German, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Spanish. While in Nauvoo, he tutored the Prophet Joseph Smith in both German and Hebrew. Alexander also holds the distinction of being the author of one of the few journal accounts of Joseph Smith's description of the First Vision. His influence is even felt in academic circles today, for included in Alexander and Ellen's posterity (they had 14 children) is the respected LDS scholar, Hugh Nibley.

Today, thousands of shoppers pass by the opening to Old Cock Yard without so much as a glance into its dark, dingy, and dank interior. Little do they know that here once lived a man of dreams, a Jewish linguist, an LDS lyricist, a matchmaker, and a dentist of unusual distinction.