

Captain John Killian 25 April 1796 - 10 November 1858

By Michael Berger 3rd Great-grandson of John Killian by Letha Jane's family line

This is the first of two installments of the history of Captain John Killian. He descends from Andreas Killian through his son John Killian and Elizabeth Zimmerman.

John Killian was born April 25, 1796 in Lincoln County, North Carolina. His father was Philip Killian and his mother was Mary Hoskins. Not much is known about John's childhood. His family moved to Missouri after the War of 1812. They were among the first settlers there. Missouri became a territory in 1812 and a state in 1821. There, he met and courted a widow by the name of Lydia Ann Hopper Conley. Lydia was born October 11, 1795 in Burke County, North Carolina. Her parents were Thomas Hopper and Rebecca.

John married Lydia Hopper on August 25, 1818 in Howard County, Missouri. John and Lydia settled down in Lexington, Lafayette, Missouri and began raising a family. Lydia had three young daughters from her first marriage; Susan, Rebecca Emma and Mary Ann. John and Lydia had their first son, George Hamilton, on September 10, 1819. A second son, Thomas, was born on April 30, 1821. Their first daughter, Letha Jane, was born on October 11, 1822. Their next child was Nancy, born on April 17, 1824. Franklin was born the next year in 1825. At this time the Killian family made a small move and Almira Josephine was born in Perry County, Missouri on March 27, 1827. The last child, Jacob, was born in Caldwell County, Missouri on December 31, 1828.

While living in Caldwell County the family met Oliver Cowdery, who was one of the six original members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. John joined the Church in September 1831 and was baptized by Oliver.

John was called to serve a mission to Kentucky on August 7, 1834. His companion was Jesse Hitchcock, who later married one of Lydia's sisters, Kisiah. Before he could leave for Kentucky, Lydia Ann passed away on October 18, 1834. The older children took care of the younger children so John could serve his mission. He served as a leader of the mission for several years.

John returned from his mission to what is now called Far West, Missouri. He was remarried on August 28, 1837 to Sarah (Sally) McClure. Sally was a cousin of his first wife, Lydia.

The members of the Church started to face ever increasing hostilities from the local citizens. John became a captain in the Caldwell County Militia during this time. He was called upon several occasions to protect the members of the Church from mob violence. Sidney Rigdon wrote; "The militia of the County of Caldwell were now all under requisition, armed and equipped according to law. The mob, after all the authority of the state had been recalled except from the force of Caldwell county, commenced the work of destruction in earnest, showing a determination to accomplish their object. Far West, where I resided, which was the shire town of Caldwell County, was placed under the charge of a captain by the name of John Killian, who made my house his headquarters."

Things came to a head in November 1838 with the order for all members of the LDS Church to be expelled from the state of Missouri. It was in this harsh winter that they walked to Illinois with what little they had. For a time they found refuge in Quincy, Adams, Illinois. It was there that Sally gave birth to a daughter, Harriet Emma, on March 10, 1839.

The members of the Church soon found a new place to live. They called the city Nauvoo, which means beautiful. John and his family moved to an area across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo in the town of Montrose, Lee, Iowa.

John was a farmer by trade and an active member of the Church. He was an Elder in the Church and was called upon many occasions to help others. One such occasion is found in the Philo Dibble autobiography. He wrote the following: "While living upon this farm, I was taken sick, Dr. (Frederick G.) Williams attended me, and after a while said he could do no more for me. I then called for the Elders to administer to me and Brother A. J Stewart, his brother, Levi (Stewart), and Brother (John) Killian were called in, but before they arrived, Mr. Robbins, of whom I rented the farm, called to see me. He declared that I might possibly live till three o'clock, but could not live till morning. When the Elders administered to me, Brother Killian being mouth, I was in bed. He poured the oil on my forehead and I jumped right out of bed and put on my clothes. On hearing that Robbins was going to Quincy in the morning, I walked up to his house, three-quarters of a mile, and went with him in his carriage to Quincy, remained all day and returned with him at night."

John continued to serve as a captain in the Nauvoo Legion (a local militia). He also helped build the Nauvoo Temple and received his temple ordinances in December 1845. He was also ordained a High Priest in the Church at this time.

(continued in next newsletter)