

**“Let This Be a Warning to All Niggers”  
The Life and Murder of Thomas Coleman in Theocratic Utah**

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Despite Mormonism’s hope of (re)creating Zion, a place of refuge for the persecuted in the desert, violence plagued a black Mormon in Utah’s early theocracy, an enslaved man named Thomas Colbourn or Coleman. He was often called Colbourn earlier in his life, perhaps being confused with the prominent British Mormon in Salt Lake at the time, also named Thomas Colbourn. Later accounts give the name of Coleman and his bowie knife was engraved with T. Coleman on it, so I feel certain that was his name.<sup>1</sup> I should also point out that Coleman was popularly known in the territory by the pejorative nickname of Nigger Tom, a very clear marker of his otherness, and his status among his fellow Saints – an outcast among the outcast, and a convenient scapegoat for the fearful. Lashing themselves together with all their guilt and sexual confusion engendered by polygamy and pedogamy,<sup>2</sup> the community of the faithful focused on the brutal punishment of a man, stereotyped as a sex criminal – and then washed its hands clean of it all, his story best forgotten for the benefit and edification of the recently-born ecclesiastical polity the Mormons called the Kingdom of God on earth.

Just when Coleman arrived in Utah is unknown. His earliest known owner is called “Col. Johnson” and “J.H. Johnson” in various sources, although the exact identify of this man is in question.<sup>3</sup> If this is prominent Utah poet and river ferry guard Joel Hills Johnson, and I have serious doubts it was, Coleman certainly did not arrive with the Johnson family in 1848. I believe he may have originally belonged to Williams Washington Camp, in which case he arrived in Utah either in October 1850 with the other members of the Camp family and the slaves they brought with them or in October 1852, when Camp brought three more male slaves to Utah after a trip to Tennessee. Coleman’s death record states that he was born sometime in 1831, but in which southern state is unknown. If the Camp family brought, it is likely he was born in Weakley Co. Tennessee, residence of the Camp family since the 1820s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Coleman’s own bowie knife was used to butcher him and then purposely left as evidence, and entered in the trial following his murder.

<sup>2</sup> I define this as the ecclesiastically authorized marriage of an adult male to a girl 16 or under, with at least a decade gap in their ages.

<sup>3</sup> See *Valley Tan*, April 19, 1859, p. 3, for “Col. Johnson” as owner of Coleman. For “J.H. Johnson” as his owner, see Hosea Stout’s diary, April 21, 1859 (p. 695).

<sup>4</sup> See the 1830 and 1840 Census of Dresden, Weakley County, Tennessee for Williams Washington Camp, his family, and his slaves.

There was a network of southern-born LDS slave-owners in Salt Lake in the 1850s that seemed periodically to sell each other their slaves and/or live near each other or have joint business ventures. This consisted of Williams Washington Camp, Thomas S. Williams, William Henry Hooper, and J.H. Johnson.<sup>5</sup> These men, although holding some lofty titles, were not very scrupulous. Camp and Williams were often excommunicated and re-baptized for their immoral and unethical business and personal relationships. They were solidly middle class men with aspirations.

Camp – born in Augusta, Georgia in 1800, moved to Alabama where he married his first wife and then they moved to Dresden, Tennessee, on the border with southwestern Kentucky. Owned several slaves – those we know were named Charlotte, Young Ike, Dan, Caroline, Ben, Old Ike and his wife Darcy. Had been a Campbellite minister before being converted in 1842 by Wilford Woodruff while he was on his mission in Tennessee. Became a blacksmith. They moved to Nauvoo with some of their slaves but freed the aging Ike and his wife Darcy. They arrived in Nauvoo in 1843 where Mrs. Camp finally was baptized herself. They moved on to Council Bluff and Winter Quarters in 1846, and then migrated to Utah in October 1850 with their six children as well as several male slaves and Charlotte, as members of the Shadrach Roundy pioneer company.<sup>6</sup> In 1851 Camp, his wife and their oldest son James (a former member of the Mormon Battalion) returned to Mississippi to get Mrs. Camp's inheritance from her father. During their 18-month's absence from Utah, the Camp family left the rest of their five children under their slave Charlotte's care, and provided for by the male slaves. However Charlotte died of pneumonia, so the Camp children were sent to neighbors to live, while the male slaves hired themselves out to support themselves. When Camp and his wife returned with five wagonloads of goods and a large sum of money in the fall of 1852, they also brought with them three more adult male slaves, several black boys, and one adult female slave. I believe that Thomas Coleman was probably in this group. Their oldest son was not with them because he had died of cholera during their journey back to the South. In 1855, when the Camp's daughter Ellen married her cousin, the family gave them Caroline and Young Ike. A year later, Ellen and her husband were called on a mission to Texas, and they took their two slaves with them – the only time that I know of where slaves were used by missionaries in the field.<sup>7</sup>

Camp practiced polygamy, having some nine or ten wives, including Mary Ann, a daughter of Thomas S. Williams. He had a total of 23 children by three of his wives. In late 1856, during the height of the Reformation, Camp was excommunicated for some reason and then restored to membership by Edwin Woolley, Bishop of the SL 13<sup>th</sup> Ward

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<sup>5</sup> Joel Hills Johnson (who frequently went by "J.H. Johnson") was a sensitive, poetic Yankee from Massachusetts (a heavily abolitionist state); also his extensive journals never mention any black people, slaves, or even servants, other than the two American Indian children his family raised.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.lds.org/churchhistory/library/pioneercompanysearchresults/1,15792,4017-1-257,00.html> <April 12, 2007>.

<sup>7</sup> Utah, Our Pioneer Heritage, Daughters of Utah Pioneers, Vol. 8, pp. 535-40.

in February 1857.<sup>8</sup> The 56-year old Williams Camp immediately married three young girls, all aged 15-17, which upset his first wife, and she divorced him. In 1863, another wife, Amelia Evans Camp, was convicted in court of killing their three-month old daughter, Laura Jane Camp, in January 1863.<sup>9</sup> A year later, Williams W. Camp was beaten up by a woman named Ann Evans, who may have been either Amelia's mother or 21-year old sister, both named Ann and living in Salt Lake at the time. Ann Evans and John Horrocks were charged with "beating and bruising Williams Camp", but Horrocks was found not guilty, while Ann Evans was found guilty and fined \$1 plus medical and legal costs.<sup>10</sup> Williams Washington Camp succumbed to pneumonia in 1875 in near Sandy (Brighton), Utah.

Thomas Stephen Williams was a really colorful character, to say the least. Born the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 13 children in 1827, his family left Tennessee just after his birth and moved to Illinois. They then moved to Hancock Co. about 1833 and joined the LDS Church in 1836. The family then moved to Hauns Mill, where Thomas was baptized when about nine. Thomas' father, Alexander, was a night guard for the LDS communities where they lived. 15-year old Thomas got a 16-year old Mormon girl named Albina Merrill pregnant so they married in Nauvoo in 1842. They would eventually have 11 children and he would have one more child by one of his two polygamous wives. While in Nauvoo, young Thomas became legendary as a thief and rogue plunderer. One friend said he had "raised stealing to the level of one of the fine arts", and one Sunday, in fact, the 16-year old Thomas stole all of the machinery of a small non-Mormon sawmill and sank it in the Mississippi River where no one ever found it. Later he bragged to another colleague that "he had stolen [everything] from a hen on her roost to a steamboat engine."<sup>11</sup> By the age of 19, he was a regular member of the Nauvoo Police and is rumored to have been a Danite. Later he was a Sergeant In the Mormon Battalion in Co. D, under Capt. Nelson Higgins, and in October 1846 was put in charge of the "Sick Detachment", under Capt. James Brown. His young wife, Albina, accompanied the Battalion, as a washer-woman, and she had her young children with her as well. Her 15-year old sister, Phoebe Lodema Merrill Stillman was also accompanying the Sick Detachment, as a nurse. Phoebe's reported first husband, Clark Stillman, had been in Co. D of the Battalion before joining the Sick Detachment. Clark's father, Dexter Stillman, was also in the Sick Detachment.

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<sup>8</sup> "Notice," *Deseret News*, March 4, 1857, p. 12. Catherine Ellen Camp Greer and her husband, Thomas Lacy Greer, after their mission, returned to Utah but then were called to settle in Arizona, near Ft. Apache, in 1879. There they had an African American named Jefferson Tribbett (or Tribbat) who worked for them. He was born about 1856 in Texas (where the Greers had served their mission), the son of Brazilian parents. In his later years, Jefferson Tribbett moved to Los Angeles, where he worked as a hostler for the LA County Hospital in the early 1900s. See references to "Jeff" and "Nigger Jeff" in "The Life Story of Mary Matilda Park Allred", autobiography, 1931, <http://www.bfjohnsonfamily.byu.edu/bfj/Books/HomeEveningWithJodieAndCora.htm> <April 20, 2007>; Jefferson Tribbat (misspelled Tribbleat in the index) in the 1880 Census of Apache County, Arizona; Jefferson Tribbett in the 1900 and 1910 Census of Los Angeles County, California.

<sup>9</sup> "Infanticide", *Deseret News*, March 11, 1863, p. 5; familysearch.org for record of Laura Jane Camp's birth and death.

<sup>10</sup> "Justices' Cp

<sup>11</sup> Dale L. Morgan, *The Great Salt Lake*, (The Bobbs-Merrill Co., New York, 1947) pp. 263-264.

The Detachment arrived in Pueblo, Colorado on November 17, 1846 and wintered there with the Mississippi Company and their group of slaves.<sup>12</sup> The combined Sick Detachment and Mississippi Company then moved north in the spring to Ft. Bridger to meet up with Young's pioneer company on their way to California-Utah.

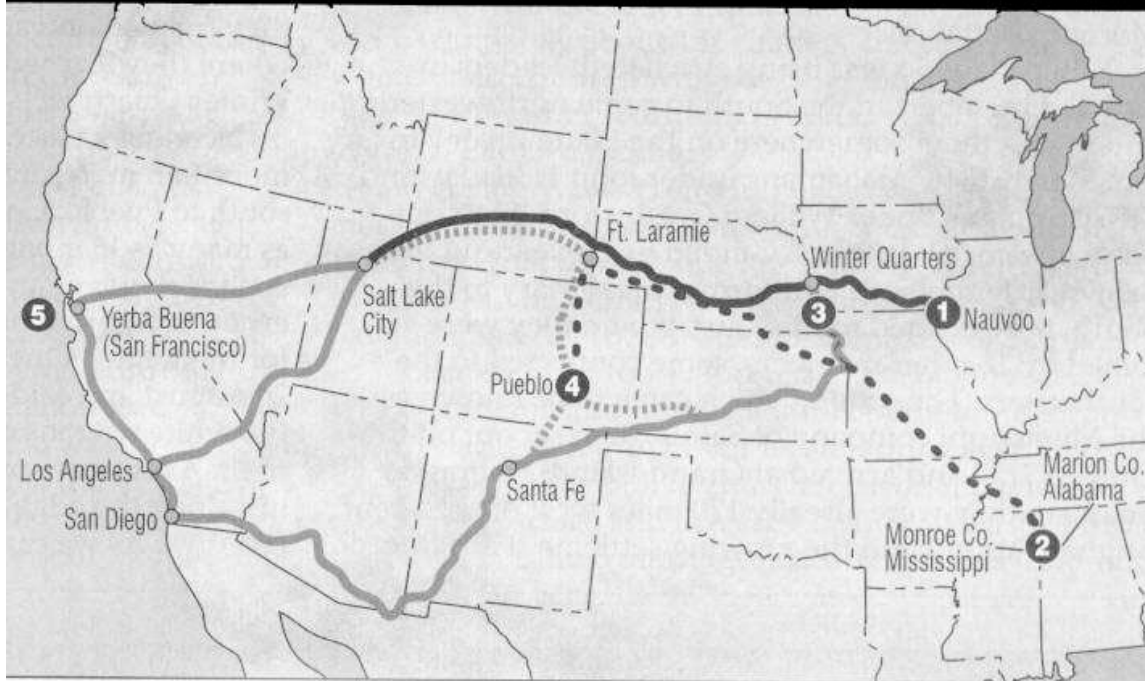
While at Ft. Bridger, Williams stole a horse from a non-Mormon trader and made a present of it to Brigham Young. Young figured out what happened and after Sgt. Williams left Ft. Bridger, Young quietly returned the horse to its rightful owner.<sup>13</sup> Young had ordered Sgt. Williams to leave the fort with both the Sick Detachment and the Mississippi Company, to continue their westward migration. This rag-tag group of ailing soldiers and weary southerners entered the Salt Lake valley on July 29, 1847, five days behind Young and the main company of pioneers. Once in Utah, Thomas Williams was involved in various skirmishes with Indians.

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<sup>12</sup> The Life, Times & Family of Orson Pratt Brown, "Captain James Brown's Santa Fe Sick Detachment," <http://www.orsonprattbrown.com/MormonBattalion/sick-detachment-roster.html> <May 16, 2007>

<sup>13</sup> William Decatur Karchner, *Memoirs*, [http://kartchner.surnames.com/histories/william\\_decatur\\_karchner\\_memoirs.htm](http://kartchner.surnames.com/histories/william_decatur_karchner_memoirs.htm) <7 August 2006> and Harold Schindler, "'Captain Young' Returns Horse Seized in Payment for Stolen Animal", *Salt Lake Tribune*, 9 July 1997, p. A2.

## Mormon Pioneer Trails, 1846-1847



- 1 – Main Body of Mormons, left Nauvoo, Illinois on February 4, 1846 —————
- 2 – Mississippi Company, left Marion Co. Alabama in March 1846 & Monroe Co. Mississippi in April. Ft. Laramie, Wyoming was unprepared for them to winter in, so the Company went south to Pueblo, Colorado and met up with #4 - - - - -
- 3 – Mormon Battalion, left Winter Quarters, Nebraska in July 1846 ————
- 4 – Mormon Battalion Sick Detachment, wintered in Pueblo with Mississippi Company .....
- 5 – 238 Mormons sailed on the Brooklyn from New York on February 4, 1846 and arrived in Yerba Buena (San Francisco) on July 31, 1846

Williams also went into the mercantile business in Salt Lake with William Henry Hooper, operating a general store called Hooper and Williams. In 1851, Williams polygamously married Lydia Phelps, daughter of William W. Phelps, the day after she turned 16. They apparently soon divorced although she did give birth to Princetta Williams first, for she married another man in 1856. In 1852 he and members of his family came here to San Francisco to get in on the Gold Rush. Once here though, instead of mining he opened a butcher business with slaughterhouses and a meat market here in the City. He only stayed in the business one year, made a lot of money in meat, and returned to Provo in 1853. A year later he sued Brigham Young for money he claimed he had loaned to the territorial legislature but Young refused to pay him back, causing a permanent rift between the two men. In 1856, Williams tried to gather a group of Mormons to explore Colorado but Heber C. Kimball denounced him from the pulpit at the Tabernacle for not waiting for Brigham Young's prophetic revelations to appoint him to settle elsewhere. Around this time, Williams began to style himself a lawyer, although it seems from territorial records that he was more often being sued by others than actually providing legal council. In October 1856, Williams and a small group of Mormons traveled to

California, but did so without church permission. This was during the Reformation so one month later, on November 16, 1856, he and the other men were excommunicated for leaving Deseret. A month later, Williams and Judge George P. Stiles (who also had recently been excommunicated on trumped up charges) had their law offices broken into by returned missionary now Salt Lake Sheriff, the alcoholic James Ferguson and his men, who dumped the legal papers of Thomas Williams and Judge Stiles into a latrine and set them on fire, literally igniting the Utah War. Finally in February of 1857, Young issued a full pardon to the group of men and they were rebaptized.<sup>14</sup> However, Williams was becoming less willing to believe in Young's prophetic claims and he decided to try to move his family out of state to get away from the rigid theocracy of the Reformation. But the day before his planned departure, 18-year old David P. Kimball, who had just recently committed incredibly moving acts of heroism in rescuing members of the Martin Handcart Company, eloped with Thomas' 14 year old daughter, Caroline. This happened when a group of young Mormon boys on horses swooped into the Williams yard, grabbed Caroline, and spirited her away to Antelope Island, where the young girl's marriage was solemnized by Heber C. Kimball and where Williams could not find them.<sup>15</sup>

Horrified by the event and threatening to kill Heber C. Kimball for his participation in this bizarre marriage, Williams left Utah anyway the following day, in a large company of "apostates", including the aforementioned Judge Stiles, and City Marshall PK Dotson, who were all fleeing from Mormon tyranny. The large company banded together for protection against Mormon vigilantes fueled by the rhetoric of the Reformation. However Williams' wife refused to go with him and leave their newly wed daughter alone, so Thomas Williams left the valley without his family. He only stayed away from Deseret for a year before deciding to return to his family. Within a few weeks of his return, Williams bought the 22-year old slave Dan from Williams W. Camp and by the following year, he also had bought two "ebony belles", one 21 and of mixed race and the other 29 and of full African ancestry, but I have been unable to discover their names. These two women will figure prominently in Thomas Coleman's life, as I will shortly relate.

In March 1860, Indians killed Williams, probably on another trip back from San Francisco, just outside of the Mormon colony of San Bernardino. Thomas had already sold Dan to William H. Hooper, but the two female slaves were each given to one of his two wives as part of his estate division. Unfortunately, his first wife, Albina Merrill Williams, was one month pregnant at the time of his murder, so his last child was born 8 months after his death. But the story does not end here. For but one month after the birth of little Norma Inazella Williams,<sup>16</sup> her widowed mother, Albina, was accosted by the newly appointed territorial governor. This man, John W. Dawson a native of Indiana and a non-Mormon, had only been in Salt Lake two weeks, when he allegedly "made grossly

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<sup>14</sup> "Legendary Sheriff Carved Early Utah Saga," Will Bagley, *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 8, 2000, p. B1.

<sup>15</sup> Wilford Woodruff Journals, 13 November 1856, vol. 4 p. 491; and Juanita Brooks (ed.), *Diaries of Hosea Stout*, p. 625 n. 88.

<sup>16</sup> Norma Inazella Williams died at the age of two on November 19, 1868; see *Deseret News*, December 2, 1868.

improper proposals” to Albina Merrill Williams. Reports circulated that she had thrashed him soundly with a fire shovel in response and he had then offered her \$3,000 for her silence, but she rebuked him. In fact she sent an affidavit, describing his outrageous behavior, to Washington DC, “where it would cause a minor sensation in the U.S. Senate.”<sup>17</sup> On January 1, 1861, Gov. Dawson surreptitiously abandoned Salt Lake City after only three weeks of in office, taking the mail stage eastward in refuge. Unfortunately seven Mormon vigilantes in their 20s (Woodward Reynolds, Lot Elisha Huntington, Isaac Neibaur, Moroni Clawson, and the three Luce brothers: Jason Reid, John Matthew, and Wilford Woodruff Luce,) caught up with the retreating governor at Ephraim Hanks’ Pony Express station at Mountain Dell. These seven young men were all members of William “Wild Bill” Hickman’s gang of marauders called “the Hounds” or “Hickman’s Hounds.”<sup>18</sup>

Ephraim Hanks promised Dawson that he was safe there, and the young Mormons initially acted friendly toward Dawson.

However after a night of drinking the seven drunken youths waited until Dawson went outside alone. Dawson discovered that someone had plundered some of his baggage (including a valuable beaver robe). Moroni Clawson “accosted [him] insolently” at that point, and then struck the governor to the ground. Jason Luce and Reynolds, aided some by the other youths, brutally beat Dawson nearly to death, kicking and beating him about the head, chest and groin (and cut off one of his testicles by some reports).<sup>19</sup> Fearful that Salt Lake would be seen as utterly out of government control, the Salt Lake sheriff James Ferguson and his deputies began rounding up the perpetrators. Jason Luce, Wood Reynolds and a third unnamed boy were caught right away, but the other three, Lot Huntington, Moroni Clawson, and one other, escaped temporarily. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, Porter Rockwell killed Lot Huntington at Fish Springs, near Tooele, and captured the other two boys. Once they got to Salt Lake, the two young men made a break, and were shot down on Second South Street on the morning of January 17, 1862.

Hooper – (not as colorful as Johnson, Camp, or Williams). Born in Md.; engaged in mercantile pursuits; moved to Illinois in 1835 and settled in Galena; engaged in trade on the Mississippi River; moved to Utah in 1850 and settled in Salt Lake City; secretary of the Territory in 1857 and 1858; member of the State senate in 1862. In 1867, Brigham Young noted that William Hooper’s mercantile store was selling more than \$28,000 per year in tobacco alone, which Young found distressing.<sup>20</sup> Died in 1882.

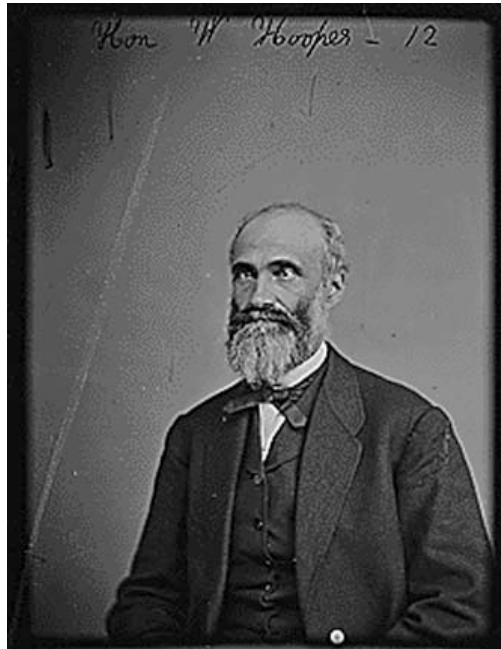
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<sup>17</sup> “Territory in Transition, Army Arrives to Stay; Governors and Pony Express Come and Go, Centennial: A Siege, a Pardon, A Bloody Massacre”, Harold Schindler, *Deseret News*, August 20, 1995, p. J1.

<sup>18</sup> Marion L. Clawson et al., *History of Moroni Clawson*, <http://www.mosesclawson.com/showdocument.asp?q=31&p=1&t=A+History+of+Moroni+Clawson> on <May 3, 2007>.

<sup>19</sup> “Governor Dawson’s Statement,” dated January 7, 1862 at Bear River Station, Utah, printed in *Deseret News*, January 22, 1862, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> “An Economic Interpretation of the “Word of Wisdom”, Leonard J. Arrington, 1959, Vol. 1, #1, pp. 45f.



**Hon. William Henry Hooper,  
Territorial Secretary of State  
by Matthew Brady, about 1860**

According to the 1899 reminiscences of Alexander Bankhead, an LDS slave, the slaves in Salt Lake in the 1850s often congregated together in a hall on State Street and 300 South.<sup>21</sup> They met to discuss the deplorable conditions under which they lived as slaves, to trade stories about how their masters treated them, with Bankhead noting that many of them “were subjected to the same treatment that was accorded the plantation negroes of the South”, to discuss ways to adjust to the dry, arid high-desert climate, and to dream of ways of escaping through the snow-capped mountains that were an intimidating and overwhelming barricade. Occasionally a slave would attempt to escape but they were always caught and returned to their Mormon masters.

For example, in June of 1856 just as the Mormon Reformation was heating up, a slave named Dan escaped from Williams Washington Camp. When Camp recovered Dan, Dan accused Camp of kidnapping him. Brigham Young even stepped in, interviewing Salt Lake County Sheriff Jesse C. Little and US Marshall Robert T. Burton about the kidnapping charges. Eventually Camp was able to provide evidence that he in fact owned Dan and was acquitted of the kidnapping charge.<sup>22</sup>

Thomas S. Williams, a highly unethical LDS merchant and lawyer, threatened to kill Heber C. Kimball. Having been recently excommunicated Williams....

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<sup>21</sup> “Slavery in Utah”, *The Broad Ax*, 25 March 1899, p. 1

<sup>22</sup> Lythgoe, *Negro Slavery in Utah*, pp. 41-42; *History of Brigham Young*, p. 359; and Jack Beller, “Negro Slaves in Utah”, *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 2 No. 4 (October 1929) p. 123



In 1859 Thomas S. Williams owned whom newspapers described as the two most beautiful black women in Utah, one was 21 and the other 29 years old, but we don't know their names. Their beauty was not only well known, but also would become the cause of deep enmity, jealousy, growing acts of violence, and eventually murder. William H. Hooper owned a slave named Shep, who was apparently at least attracted to one or both of the women, while JH Johnson's 28-year old slave Thomas Coleman was also in a sexual relationship with one or both of the women, and the two men grew jealous of the advances of the other. In March 1859, William Woodland, a 26-year old farm laborer, witnessed a serious fight between the two competing black men.<sup>23</sup> Shep Hooper ended the fight by drawing a revolver on Thomas Coleman and threatening to kill him. Even though that particular fight between the two men was over, still the animosity between them grew.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Murder of Shep Hooper<sup>25</sup>**

The jealousy came to a head on Monday night, April 18, 1859, somewhere near both the home of the William H. Hooper and the corral for the Salt Lake House, where Coleman worked, when neighbors were aroused by three gunshots, fired in rapid succession. The 28-year old Coleman had apparently been visiting Thomas Williams' two beautiful slaves and Shep Hooper either saw him or otherwise found out about it. Shep hunted Tom Coleman down and began yelling at him, which led to a fistfight. Tom, who was concerned because of Shep's earlier threats to kill him, was armed, and he drew his revolver. Firing three times, he missed Shep with the first shot, then hit Shep in the hand with the second, and finally shot Shep in the shoulder, but the bullet ranged off the right shoulder bone and lodged in the back of Shep Hooper's head, yet he survived the shooting.

Two other black men, Francis or Frank Pope and Benjamin Perkins, witnessed the fight. Pope was a 59-year old single blacksmith and ex-slave from Virginia who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> Ward in a cabin between Matthias Cowley (father of the future scandalous apostle) and William I. Appleby, the informant who complained to Young in 1846 about Walker Lewis's son marrying a white woman.<sup>26</sup> Ben Perkins was the 19-year old slave of Reuben Perkins from Davis County, Utah and was a native of Missouri. The *Deseret News* that night made fun of the fighting men in an article called "Aspiring Darkies", jokingly comparing their fight to a duel between "high-aspiring men":

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<sup>23</sup> *Deseret News*, 21 September 1859, p. 5

<sup>24</sup> "Shooting Affair", *Valley Tan*, 19 April 1859, p. 3 and "Aspiring Darkies", *Deseret News*, 20 April 1859, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> No records exist giving Shep the surname of Hooper. However LDS custom at the time dictated that slaves generally used their owners' surname as their own, as in the cases of the Camp, Bankhead, Crosby, and Perkins slaves of Utah for example. Also, personally I felt the need to allow Shep the dignity of a surname, so I chose this as a viable reconstructed name.

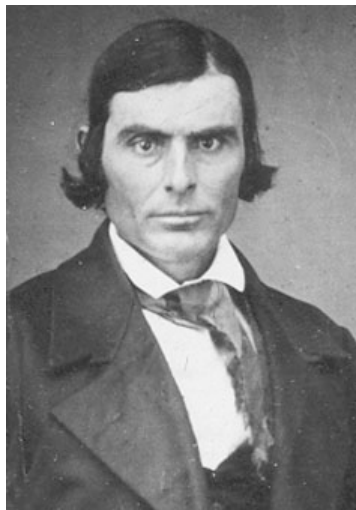
<sup>26</sup> 1860 Territorial Census of Salt Lake 14<sup>th</sup> Ward, p. 54.

ASPIRING DARKIES.—On last Monday evening two negroes, who were rivals for the affections of an Ethiopian damsel, had some words about the object of their aspirations, which being unsatisfactory to one of them, he drew a revolver and fired three shots at his opponent, after the most improved fashion of the day, among *high-aspiring* men, without distinction of color.

Two of the shots took effect—one striking and breaking the collar bone and inflicting a severe wound in his right shoulder, and the other passing through one of his hands. The villain then fled and has not yet been found.

“Aspiring Darkies”, *Deseret News*, April 20, 1859, p. 4

Although Shep Hooper actually lived for several days, Coleman realized he was in deep trouble and immediately ran away. He was caught early the next morning at the mouth of Emigration Canyon, trying to flee out the way that the Mormon migrants most often entered the Salt Lake Valley. Coleman was then arrested for attempted murder and put in jail with a \$1000 bail. On April 21, Coleman’s master, J. H. Johnson secured the services of Seth Blair and Hosea Stout, two well-known LDS lawyers, to defend Coleman in court.<sup>27</sup> Sometime between then and July, Shep Hooper died from his wounds, so the charge against Coleman was changed to murder.



Hosea Stout



Seth M. Blair

<sup>27</sup> Hosea Stout’s diary, April 21, 1859 (p. 695).

On August 3, a jury was empanelled to hear the case against Coleman. Two physicians were called to explain the wounds and resulting death. Shep's master, William H. Hooper, was also called because Shep had told him who shot him. However Blair and Stout objected to this testimony because it was second-hand, and not trustworthy.

Frank Pope, the 59-year old blacksmith was then called but feigned amusing ignorance. Hosea Stout tried to get Pope to testify that Shep had threatened to kill Coleman earlier. The prosecution objected but the judge, a usually very drunken Charles Sinclair as noted by Hosea Stout, overruled the objection.

The prosecution then called Elias H. Perry, a very wealthy merchant from either Maryland or Kentucky, who lived at the Townsend Hotel, which was located very close to the corral where the fight had taken place. Apparently he had run out to see what the shooting was about and discovered the wounded Shep, but had not seen Coleman do the shooting.

Young Ben Perkins, the slave from Davis County, was then called but was nowhere to be found. Seth Blair tried to get the prosecution to move on without Perkins' testimony, but the DA insisted on having him testify. The bailiff then took charge of the jury and sequestered them for the night to await Ben Perkins.

Quite coincidentally the judge then started to hear the case of *Miller v. Williams*, in which A.B. Miller claimed that the two slave women owned by Thomas S. Williams, who were the catalyst in Shep's murder, were actually Miller's property and not Williams. Williams was able to successfully prove over the next few days that the black women were his and not Miller's.

The next day, August 4, the trial resumed, yet Ben Perkins had not been found, so the court went into recess until noon, to give the city marshal time to find Perkins. Marshal Dotson returned to the court at noon and ashamedly reported that he had taken young Ben into custody, but while awaiting the trial to resume, Ben had asked permission to use the outhouse. The marshal, feeling very sick himself, allowed the young man to go by himself and Ben had escaped from the outhouse. The angry judge commanded the marshal to get a posse and arrest Ben Perkins. But the marshal returned empty handed and claimed that a white person had "had run him off". Then for a second night, the jury was sequestered to await the testimony of Ben Perkins. Yet again the next day, Ben Perkins was not found and finally Judge Sinclair discharged the jury and declared a mistrial.<sup>28</sup>

Five days later, Stout and Blair filed a motion with the court to allow Thomas Coleman to be set free after the mistrial. Unfortunately the court didn't make a ruling on this motion

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<sup>28</sup> "Third Judicial Court", *Deseret News*, 10 August 1859, p. 4.

because it then became caught up in the murder case of Sgt. Ralph Pike, a Ft. Douglas soldier who had been gunned down in broad daylight in downtown Salt Lake with some 100 witnesses. But, as usually happened with such cases in this theocracy where the murderer was a Mormon and the victim was not (or was a dissenter), all the witnesses played dumb and claimed they could not properly identify the assailant nor his accomplices.<sup>29</sup> Finally on August 16 – almost two weeks after the mistrial, the court got around to ruling on the motion to discharge Coleman but it was overruled. On the 18<sup>th</sup>, Blair and Stout asked the court to allow Coleman out on bail, but the court ruled it was not aailable case. Blair then demanded an immediate trial for Coleman, as he had been in jail since April, some five months now. Still it would be another full month before another jury would be called to retry the Coleman case.

On September 15, 1859 the Third Judicial Court met and empanelled the new jury, all of whom were white and Mormons as far as I can tell, including several polygamists, including the juror Apostle John Taylor, who would later be president of the LDS Church.<sup>30</sup> This time the trial only lasted three hours. The defense produced an unnamed black person who testified that Shep Hooper had drawn a revolver on Coleman in March and had told Coleman that if he could not kill him then, he would kill Coleman “at some other time.” Ben Perkins was not called to testify at this trial, but the former slave Frank Pope was. Ironically, Pope was the one not to be found during this trial but the court decided to proceed without his testimony, and he was fined \$20 for contempt of court.<sup>31</sup> In just one hour, the jury returned with the verdict that Coleman was guilty of manslaughter and he was assessed a term of punishment at one year hard labor in the territorial penitentiary and he was fined \$100. On Monday, September 19, 1859, Judge Charles Sinclair pronounced sentence upon Coleman, as agreed upon by the jury the Friday before, and Coleman was sent to the pen, which was a small adobe building located in Sugar House, where Albert P. Rockwood was the warden and Wilford Woodruff the inspector.<sup>32</sup> These two Mormons had known Walker Lewis the best and as missionaries had often stayed in his homes in Boston and Lowell.

Either Coleman was a model prisoner or the time he spent in jail awaiting his trial was counted toward his sentence, for his spent less than nine months of his twelve-month sentence in the penitentiary. We know he was released prior to July 31, 1860, because the census of the Sugar House penitentiary taken that day did not list him among the prisoners.<sup>33</sup>

## **Brigham Young’s Hatred of Black & White Miscegenation**

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<sup>29</sup> Hosea Stout Diary, 12 August 1859, p. 700-701; *Lorenzo Brown Journal*, 12 August 1859, Vol. I, p. 347, *Valley Tan*, 17 August 1859.

<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately John Taylor left no diary for this time period; nor does he refer to this in any known documentation.

<sup>31</sup> *Deseret News*, 21 September 1859, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Deseret News*, 21 September 1859, p. 5

<sup>33</sup> 1860 Utah Territorial Census for Sugar House, p. 224.

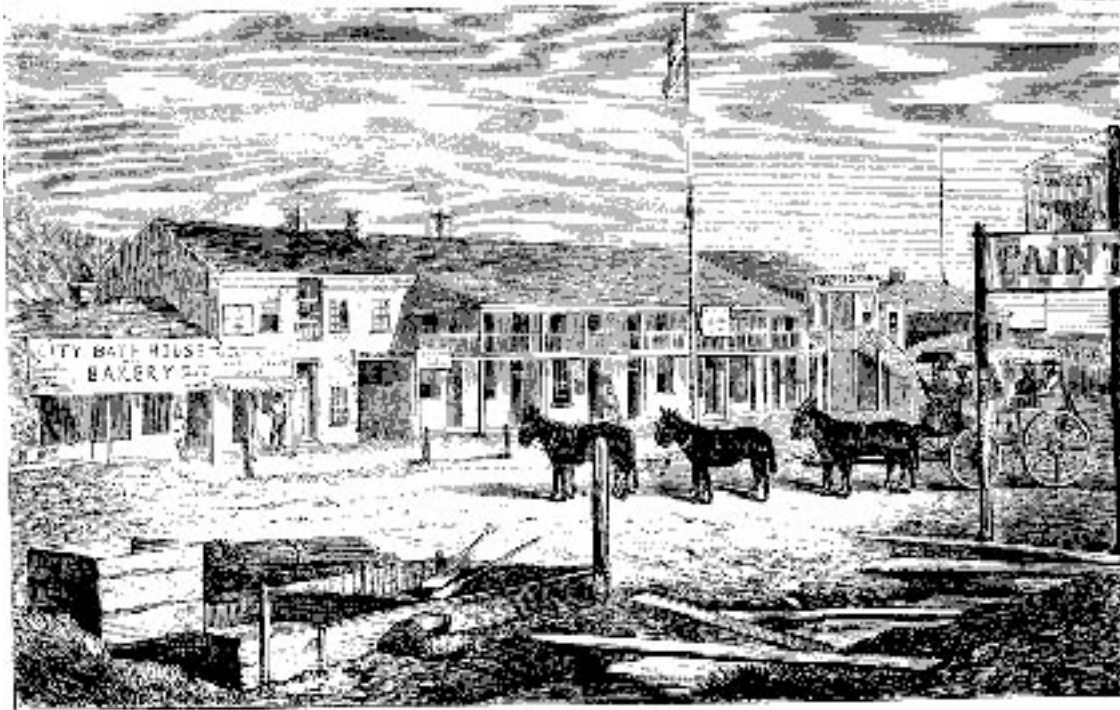
After his release from prison, Coleman worked for Brigham Young and Young's nephew, Feramorz Little (1820-1887),<sup>34</sup> for many years as an attendant at the Salt Lake House, the pony express station and hotel the two men owned, and located at what is now 143 S. Main Street. [Little's bio says he and Young did not purchase the Salt Lake House until 1865!]<sup>35</sup> Sir Richard Burton, who traveled to Utah in the summer of 1860, left a charming account of his stay at the Salt Lake House; unfortunately he does not mention Tom by name, upon arriving on August 25:

Nearly opposite the Post-office, in a block on the eastern side, with a long veranda, supported by trimmed and painted posts, was a two-storied, pent-roofed building, whose sign-board, swinging to a tall, gibbet-like flag-staff, dressed for the occasion, announced it to be the Salt Lake House, the principal, if not the only establishment of the kind in New Zion. In the Far West, one learns not to expect much of the hostelry; I had not seen aught so grand for many a day. Its depth is greater than its frontage, and behind it, secured by a *porte cochère*, is a large yard for corralling cattle. A rough-looking crowd of drivers, drivers' friends, and idlers, almost every man openly armed with revolver and bowie-knife, gathered around the doorway to greet Jim [???], and "prospect" the "new lot;" and the host came out to assist us in transporting our scattered effects. We looked vainly for a bar on the ground floor; a bureau for registering names was there, but (temperance, in public at least, being the order of the day) the usual tempting array of bottles and decanters was not forthcoming; up stairs we found a Gentile ballroom, a tolerably furnished sitting-room, and bedchambers, apparently made out of a single apartment by partitions too thick to be strictly agreeable. The household had its deficiencies; blacking for instance, had run out, and servants could not be engaged till the expected arrival of the hand-cart train. However, the proprietor, Mr. Townsend, a Mormon, from the State of Maine... who had married an Englishwoman, was in the highest degree civil and obliging, and he attended personally to our wants, offered his wife's services to Mrs. Dana, and put us all in the best of humors, despite the closeness of the atmosphere, the sadness ever attending one's first entrance into a new place, the swarms of "emigration flies" [deer flies] – and a certain populosity of bedstead, concerning which the less said the better. Such, gentle reader, are the results of my first glance at Zion on the tops of the mountains, in the Holy City of the Far West.

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<sup>34</sup> Feramorz Little was the son of Brigham's sister, Susan Young, and her husband James Little, who left her widowed with three young boys in 1824. He also married Fannie Maria Decker, the sister of his uncle Brigham's plural wives, Lucy and Clara Decker, and of Mormon rogue Charles Decker, although Feramorz was not yet converted to Mormonism.

<sup>35</sup> <http://heritage.uen.org/resources/Wcd5a8c1a19485.htm>, accessed June 8, 2008.



**The Salt Lake House hotel, where Thomas Coleman worked  
Engraving from Sir Richard Burton's *City of the Saints* (1860)**

We also know that sometime during his residence in Utah Thomas Coleman decided to officially join the LDS Church and became a “popular member”, according to later newspaper reports. It is possible that Coleman was Young’s personal slave for a time, although he is only first referred to as his servant and later as Young’s employee at the Salt Lake House. Although Congress officially ended slavery in US territories (including Utah territory) on June 19, 1862, I searched all existing newspapers for news of this and found no such emancipation reported in any Utah papers, so I don’t believe the slaves held in Utah were informed of their early emancipation by Lincoln’s administration. In fact, evidence suggests that slave owners in Utah territory did not free their slaves until the Civil War ended in April 1865.<sup>36</sup>

If this is the case, then Thomas Coleman only lived in freedom from bondage for a year and a half before being brutally murdered, allegedly for “meddling” with a white woman. Pres. Brigham Young, as clearly noted in my biography of Walker Lewis, was vehemently opposed to sexual relations between whites and anyone with any black African ancestry, even if legally married consenting adults. Young made this clear on March 8, 1863, when he publicly affirmed that the price for miscegenation between white and black was nothing less than blood atonement. He asked the congregation,

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<sup>36</sup> See “Slavery in Utah”, footnote 3.

Shall I tell you the law of God in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so.<sup>37</sup>

This is a reversal of Young's law he pushed through the territorial legislature back in 1852 when Walker Lewis was in Salt Lake, which punished the perpetrators of black-white sexual relations with a \$500-1000 fine and three years imprisonment.<sup>38</sup> Now 11 years later, Young called for their life's blood. In fact this statement is an important revision of his Jan 1852 statement he made before the legislative assembly, as recorded by Wilford Woodruff in his journal. In that speech, Young said:

Let me consent to day to mingle my seed with the seed of Cane[,] It would Bring the same [Priesthood] curse upon me And it would upon any man. And if any man mingles his seed with the seed of Cane the ownly way he Could get rid of it or have salvation would be to Come forward & **have his head Cut off & spill his Blood upon the ground.** It would also take the life of his Children.<sup>39</sup>

Note that here, the offender must be willing to "come forward" voluntarily and consent to the act of blood atonement, in order to cleanse himself and his children from the curse of not being allowed to hold priesthood. In 1852 then, this was a consensual act of expiation, to alleviate the priesthood curse. By 1863, being murdered for mixing whites with blacks is simply an eternal penalty "under the law of God" in Young's theocracy.

Mormon officials continued their racist fear of black-white intermarriage until well into the 1960s, which is also when Utah's anti-miscegenation law was finally repealed. On September 26, 1961, for example, LDS president David O. McKay recorded in his journal:

We do not welcome negroes [sic] into our social affairs because if we did it would lead to inter-marriage, and we do not favor inter-marriage. We recommend that negroes marry negroes, and that whites marry whites, and we cannot modify that statement. We object to negroes marrying whites for their own happiness....We cannot change our attitude until we receive a revelation from the Lord directing otherwise.

Three months later, McKay reiterated his stance in his diary, clarifying that it was a personally held belief: "If they [black people] would stay with themselves and marry

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<sup>37</sup> *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 1, p. 110.

<sup>38</sup> "An Act in Relation to Service", *Acts, Resolutions, and Memorials Passed by the First Annual, and Special Sessions, of the Legislative Assembly, of the Territory of Utah*, 1852, printed by Brigham Young Jr.

<sup>39</sup> Wilford Woodruff Journal, entry between January 4, 1852 and February 8, 1852

among themselves, the question will [sic] be easy, but intermarriage would be an inevitable result, and I don't believe in it."<sup>40</sup>

## SUSA YOUNG GATES

All she does is regurgitate Henry Preserved Smith's 1903 "Old Testament History" (which is full of Biblical pseudo-scientific British and German theories of natural white supremacy). Gates then backs up Smith with modern "revelation" and genealogical records (she was president of the Utah Genealogical Society). I've always regarded her as something of a hero because of her early feminism. Now my admiration has been tempered by the discovery that she was quite racist. Since I will be dealing with Brigham Young's racialist theories in my upcoming MHA paper, I think I will use his daughter's book as an example of his influences.

## THE MURDER

On Monday, December 10, 1866, Thomas Coleman was lured to an obscure place in the late afternoon. Later reports indicate Coleman was called outside of the town limits on some pretended errand, some two miles to the west of Salt Lake.<sup>41</sup> Once there, he was captured by at least two people, one rumored to have been Porter Rockwell, and he was bashed over the head with a rock. The assailants then took Coleman's own bowie knife, which was engraved "T. Coleman", and they slit his throat so deeply that his neck was nearly severed in two – remember, Young said "have his head cut off"? They also slit open his right breast, and then castrated him, in what surely was a temple-based "blood atonement" killing, performed on one who was never allowed to enter the temple or participate in its rituals. In fact, I would argue that this is the clearest act of non-consensual "blood atonement" in the history of the LDS theocracy.

The murderers then must have wrapped up his corpse, including his bloody knife and the rock used to brain him, and they cautiously hauled his corpse, likely by wagon, to what is now Capitol Hill. I believe there was only one building on the hill at that time, being the Arsenal, which is where the Museum of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers now stands. Coleman's body was left behind the Arsenal, arranged on his back with his head to the west, and the bloody rock and bloody knife were placed next to him. Then a pre-made, penciled placard was pinned to his chest. Brigham Young Jr. reported in his journal that the "nigger" found dead had a note reading "Let this be a warning to all niggers that they meddle not with white women." However both the Salt Lake Daily Telegraph (owned by fringe Mormon TBH Stenhouse) and the Daily Union Vedette (run by the soldiers at Ft.

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<sup>40</sup> For the repeal of Utah's law, see Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism*, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 180. David O. McKay, Diary, September 26, 1961 and January 9, 1962, as quoted in Gary James Bergera, "Tensions in David O. McKay's First Presidencies," *Journal of Mormon History*, 33 no. 1 (Spring 2007), p. 193.

<sup>41</sup> These reports actually said two miles *east* of downtown Salt Lake, which would have been squarely in the middle of Ft. Douglas; therefore I conclude that the originator of the reports meant west (about where Redwood Road is, 1800 West).



Douglas) reported that the placard read: “Notice to all Niggers. Take warning. Leave white women alone.” This of course leads us to the conclusion that Coleman’s murder was race-based hate crime, but the circumstances seem to indicate that this was only a cover-up.



**View of Great Salt Lake City from what is now Capitol Hill looking southward,  
from Sir Richard Burton’s, *City of the Saints*, p. 201**

- 1 – The Arsenal building**
- 2 – “Temple Block” with Endowment House and old Tabernacle**
- 3 – Salt Lake House hotel**
- 4 – Lion House and Beehive House (Young’s residences)**

In any case, Coleman’s corpse lay behind the old Arsenal until the following afternoon, when a group of boys playing on the hill found him. The boys reported the corpse right away but inexplicably Salt Lake City Police Captain, Andrew Burt and his squad did not go looking for it until nighttime. The *Vedette* reported that Capt. Burt did not find the body until about 9:00 pm on Tuesday – some 28 hours or so after the actual murder.



**Mormon Thug and Salt Lake Policeman, Andrew H. Burt**

Ironically Andrew Hill Burt, the 38-year old Scottish polygamist who had been a policeman nearly since his arrival in Salt Lake in 1851, would later be gunned down outside the Salt Lake House by a clearly-insane (and possibly drunk) black man in 1883, resulting in another horrible lynching. Sam Harvey, the 35-year old crazed black perpetrator and former US Soldier, was subdued by none other than Elijah Abel, the most famous black Mormon Elder, and Harvey was quickly arrested and moved to the city jail, where some 2,000 angry Salt Lake residents gathered while police officers beat him with clubs and brass knuckles. When word came to the jail that Capt. Andrew Burt had died from Harvey's gunshots, the police released Harvey to the frenzied crowd. He was beaten and stomped on by the mainly Mormon mob, while others grabbed rope. Leather straps from nearby horse harnesses were used to whip him and then a noose thrown over his neck and he was hung from a beam in the police horse stable. Several prominent white citizens who tried to calm down the crowd and call for a fair trial rather than a lynching were nearly killed themselves. They were only saved because a police officer threw them into a jail cell and locked the door so no one could get at them. After he was dead, Harvey's body was cut down by the mob and drug down State Street until Mayor William Jennings stopped the madness and dispersed the crowd. Still, Harvey's body was subjected to even more cruelty: his skin was flayed off and apparently his internal organs removed – for only his skeleton was buried, and that not even in the paupers' section of the city cemetery, but just outside of it – leaving Sam Harvey literally forever beyond the pale.<sup>42</sup>

Records for the Salt Lake City Cemetery indicate that Thomas Coleman was also buried in the pauper's section on Tuesday, December 11. Since his corpse was found at 9:00 pm that night, he must have been buried in an extremely rapid fashion, to get his corpse into the December ground by midnight. How the Salt Lake cemetery's gravedigger got a site

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<sup>42</sup> Harold Schindler, "Frenzied Mob Kills 'Murderer'", *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 18, 1995, p. J1, [http://historytogo.utah.gov/salt\\_lake\\_tribune/in\\_another\\_time/100895.html](http://historytogo.utah.gov/salt_lake_tribune/in_another_time/100895.html). When his skeletal remains were later accidentally uncovered, Harvey was reburied inside the pauper's section.

dug in the paupers' section in less than three hours on a December night begs the incredible. I have to think that for Coleman to be buried so rapidly mid-winter, the cemetery's sexton, Jesse C. Little, had made sure that a hole had already been dug for him. Admittedly, perhaps it was Jesse Little's practice to have grave-holes dug in the pauper's section before winter set in, just for such purposes but my inclination is to think that Little may have been in on the planning of Coleman's murder.

In any case, the very next morning after the discovery of Coleman's frozen corpse and the burial, a Coroner's Jury was called, with George Stringham acting as foreman. Stringham, unfortunately for Coleman's case, was a Mormon vigilante himself, more often associated with so-called Danites like Porter Rockwell and Wild Bill Hickman. In fact Stringham at that time had an outstanding warrant for his arrest as an accessory in the 1859 murder of Sgt. Ralph Pike, which had also occurred outside the Salt Lake House, while Thomas Coleman was in jail awaiting his trial for murdering Shep Hooper.<sup>43</sup> In fact, George Stringham had been called to be on the jury for Coleman's 1859 trial but had been dismissed because he had never paid his taxes. I have yet to uncover who was responsible for making Stringham foreman of the Coroner's Jury – the answer to that might be very revealing. In any case, Stringham met that day with the rest of the jury and immediately came back with their statement.

Stenhouse's *Daily Telegraph* reported the full findings of the inquest:

We the jury empaneled and sworn to inquire as it relates to the death of Thomas Coleman, do find from the testimony and apparent circumstances that the said Coleman was found in company with a white woman, at or near the place where he was found dead, by some relative or friend of the woman, and was then and there set upon, and beat on the head with a large stone, which was lying by his head with blood on it. There was a knife lying by him which had Coleman's name engraved on it; said knife was known to belong to Coleman; said knife was bloody. There was three wounds inflicted on him; one on the neck and two on the body, which we have reason to believe were done with said knife.

The person or persons committing said murder to the jury are unknown.

Geo. Stringhom [sic], Sen.,  
Foreman.

The editor of the *Union Vedette* immediately called this clearly inaccurate statement into question. The paper astutely pointed out that despite the braining and mutilation of the body, there was no blood found near Coleman's corpse. Now I'm no forensics expert but I have watched a fair share of CSI so I know that when a mutilated corpse is found but no blood is present, the mutilation either occurred elsewhere or LONG after death – but both the stone and the knife were bloody, indicating that the throat and breast slitting and the

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<sup>43</sup> Harold Schindler, "Is That You, Pike? Feud Between Settlers, Frontier Army Erupts and Simmers for Three Decades", *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 2, 1995, p. J1.

castration occurred at the time of the murder, so the body was obviously moved. The paper also pointed that the prepared placard found pinned to the body serves as “strong evidence of the premeditation on the part of the perpetrators of the act....Men...roused to the phrensy (sic) of passion by real or supposed outrage to wife, sister or daughter and in that state commit murder, do NOT go prepared with warning placards, or stop after the deed to write and affix them.” This is an extremely good point. Furthermore, the *Vedette* wondered who testified about seeing Thomas Coleman with a white woman near the place where he was murdered and then pointedly stated that surely such a witness would also have seen Coleman’s murderers. I must also point out that since Coleman was clearly killed elsewhere and then his corpse deposited behind the Arsenal, no witness could have seen Coleman there behind the Arsenal on Monday night speaking with a white woman. The editor of the *Vedette* clearly did not believe jury foreman George Stringham or any other member of the Inquest, humorously stating that the ONLY fact that the jury truly ascertained was that Coleman’s mutilated body had been found and the rest of their “findings” were purely an exercise in imagination.

### **Accounts of the Murder**

Historians must rely on only two newspaper sources for details on Coleman’s murder. The *Daily Union Vedette* and T.B.H. Stenhouses’s *Salt Lake Daily Telegraph* are the only papers who seem to have covered the story. Unfortunately the Mormon-owned paper, the *Deseret News*, did not publish any issues from November 28, 1866 until January 2, 1867.

I have access to four major collections of electronically-scanned early US newspapers (American Periodicals Service or APS Online through my staff position at UC Santa Cruz; 19<sup>th</sup> Century US Newspapers Database, and Early American Newspapers, Series I, 1690-1876, both via membership in the New England Historic Genealogical Society; and the Newspapers & Periodicals Database, through membership in ancestry.com) and unfortunately Thomas Coleman’s murder is not found in any of those databases.

Additionally, since Californians at the time kept a close watch on Utah’s affairs, a manual search of the microfilmed premier California newspaper of that day, the *Daily Alta Californian* out of San Francisco, found no mention of Coleman’s death. Quite coincidentally though, San Francisco was dealing with it’s own racial murder at the same time. On December 10, 1866, the same day Coleman was murdered in Utah, Samuel Brown, an African American bootblack with a shop on Clay Street in San Francisco, was murdered. Like Coleman, Brown had been bludgeoned in the head, but with “a club, or some blunt instrument.” Evidence showed that he too had been murdered elsewhere and had his body dumped at Brenham Place to mislead the police investigation. It seems though that in Samuel Brown’s case, justice was served. The chief suspect was a 33 year-old white man named George “Cockeye” Stanton, a drayman (wagon delivery man) from Massachusetts. Stanton was seen quarreling with Brown over a crab at the grocery store at the corner of Pike and Clay streets a half an hour before Brown was found dead. On December 14, 1866, George Stanton was formally charged with Samuel Brown’s murder and the case was examined by Judge Alfred Rix, although I was unable to find

the outcome of the trial.<sup>44</sup> Simultaneously, the citizens of San Francisco were also reeling from the “story of horror” about the local Reese Jenkins family. Jenkins, a well-known alcoholic and “inveterate wife-whipper” from Wales had finally died after years committing petty crimes throughout the Sacramento and San Francisco areas. Now eight year-old Reese Jenkins Jr. was in Police Court for having run away from the Industrial School, to which he was sent for committing “a petty offence.” His “poor, distressed, haggard-looking mother” Isabella Jenkins had shown up at the jail to visit her son with a baby in arms. A newspaper reporter who happened to be there as well, noticed that her baby was missing one eye. When asked about it, Isabella Jenkins began to reveal a tragic tale of child abuse. “His father stuck a fork in it and put it out in a fit of drunken rage!” she told the horrified reporter. Even worse, just before the father had died, the other eye had been blinded by the drunken man – by repeatedly dripping his chewing tobacco “into the tender thing’s eyes, until it went blind in its agony.”<sup>45</sup> With such local front-page sensationalism to occupy its citizens, it is no wonder that the San Francisco paper did not cover Coleman’s murder in Utah.

What really did happen that fateful night of December 10, 1866? If we accept the findings of the Inquest and the evidence of the placard at face value, then it seems that Thomas Coleman was courting or at least trying to court a white Mormon woman of extremely high status. I could speculate that since Coleman worked for Brigham Young at the Salt Lake House, which was about a block away from the Beehive and Lion Houses, where he had also apparently worked as a servant or slave of Young, then, perhaps it was one of Young’s own daughters who was the white apple of his black eye. Certainly Young, and just about ONLY Young, could have called up such resources as to have Coleman murdered and then the court case cleaned up and forgotten so quickly.

The alacrity with which Coleman’s body was buried and the inquest concluded – in less than 18 hours – indicates to me that something else was going on. In fact, immediately after his murder and for several years afterwards, reports circulated among the non-Mormon population that Coleman had decided to be an informant against Young and his theocracy. When I realized that in that setting and socio-political context, a black servant is literally invisible to white authorities, it is very reasonable to assume that Coleman was literally the “man who knew too much”. He was the proverbial fly on the wall that heard conversations between Young and his inferiors that no one else heard. Coleman is said to have known things about the Parrish-Potter murders, in which my own 2<sup>nd</sup> great uncle, William Parrish and his sons were murdered when they stopped believing in Mormonism and attempted to peaceably escape from Utah in March 1857. Information on the Mountain Meadows Massacre of the first 9/11 (in 1857) was also hinted at, but in my opinion most likely was that Coleman had information or evidence relating to the murder of Dr. John King Robinson, which had occurred less than two months earlier, in October 1866. Another murder even earlier that year is also a possibility – that of Squire Newton Brassfield (misidentified in Bancroft once as Beanfield).

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<sup>44</sup> “Probable Murder,” *Daily Alta Californian*, December 10, 1866, p. 1 and “Charged with Murder,” *Daily Alta Californian*, December 14, 1866, p. 1. Stanton does not appear in the 1870 or 1880 Federal Censuses, so if he was convicted, it is likely he was executed for the murder.

<sup>45</sup> “A Story of Horror,” *Daily Alta Californian*, December 10, 1866, p. 1.

## **The Assassination of S. Newton Brassfield**

I will first cover Brassfield's murder. Squire Newton Brassfield was born in 1838 probably in Goshen, Macon County, Missouri, the last of nine children to Dennis Michael T. and Clarissa Williams Brassfield, both natives of Tennessee. Goshen, Missouri was about 80 miles from Nauvoo, Illinois and lay halfway between Nauvoo and Far West, Missouri. Sometime during the 1840s, the Brassfield family moved from Goshen to the Lancaster area, in Schuyler County, Missouri, about 50 miles west of Nauvoo and contingent with the southern border of Iowa.<sup>46</sup>

A correspondent from Provo, only identified by the initials W.D.R., reported to in the *Salt Lake Daily Telegraph* that Newton Brassfield married a woman in Kansas, and then left her to go to California first and then to the silver mines in the boomtown of Austin, Nevada about 1862.

Dear Sir :--There seems to be considerable excitement over the Brassfield case. For the satisfaction of those who were not acquainted with Brassfield before he came to Utah, I will say to them that Mrs. Hill was not the first woman he caused to leave her husband. Brassfield was a married man and has a wife in Kansas, whom he has been away from several years.

I was acquainted with Brassfield before he came to Utah, and told him before and after he came here how men were expected to conduct themselves while here, and cautioned him particularly not to tamper with any man's wife or daughter while he was here, for if he did the probability was he would get into trouble.

Yours, etc., (Signed) "W. D. R."

If this first marriage is true, I can find no evidence of it, and in fact, a business partner of Brassfield publicly denied it. However, I have been able to identify the mysterious W.D.R. which leads me to believe his account may be trustworthy. William DeWitt (or DeWitts) Roberts was a long-time member of the LDS Church; his parents had converted in 1847 and the family was listed as being members of the Garden Grove, Iowa Branch of the Church in 1849. The family then migrated to Utah in 1851 as part of the Garden Grove Company. But prior to their conversion, the Roberts family had lived in Lancaster, Missouri at the same time the Brassfield family lived there, and they surely must have known each other well. William D. Roberts apparently returned to Lancaster in 1859-60, but this time as a Mormon missionary. After this mission, he briefly came back to Utah (staying about one year) and then returned to Lancaster in February 1862 to marry his fiancée, Julia Maria Lusk, also a resident of Lancaster, and likely one of his converts from his earlier mission there. Since most members of the Brassfield family also resided around Lancaster throughout the same era, William D. Roberts (or his new

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<sup>46</sup> 1840 Census of Goshen, Missouri and 1850 Census of District 91, Schuyler Co., Missouri.

bride) certainly would have learned of any marriage entered into by Newton Brassfield, and I tend to trust his word that indeed Newton had a wife in Kansas. However, I have been unable to locate their marriage record in Kansas Territory, but given the time period, I doubt any record would have survived; perhaps it will turn up eventually in an heirloom family bible. Also, neither the 1860 nor 1870 Censuses of Kansas list any single women with the last name of Brassfield; still, since Roberts didn't report what year the marriage occurred, the alleged wife could have still been unmarried in 1860 and then remarried by 1870.

After making it rich as a freighter in the silver boom of Austin, Nevada, Newton Brassfield was visiting Salt Lake City in March 1866 when he met the reportedly very beautiful Mary Emma Milam Hill, who also happened to be the third wife of LDS polygamist, Archibald Newel Hill. And the good Brother Hill happened to be away on a mission.

Mary Emma Milam Hill, also a native Missourian, had been born into the LDS Church in 1837 (making her about a year older than Brassfield), in Far West, to William and Elizabeth Case Milam of Kentucky. The Milams (with their three or four surviving children) had migrated to Salt Lake in the James McGaw pioneer company of 1852.<sup>47</sup> Less than one month after being sealed to his wife for eternity by Orson Pratt in the home of William Wilson, William Milam died of "consumption" on February 24, 1853 in Salt Lake, leaving young Mary Emma fatherless. On Christmas day of that same year,<sup>48</sup> the 14-year old Mary Emma Milam married 34-year old Scottish convert Archibald Newell Hill as his third wife.



**Mary Emma Milam Perkins Hill Brassfield Fairchild, ca. 1880s**

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<sup>47</sup> See <http://www.lds.org/churchhistory/library/pioneercompanysearchresults/1,15792,4017-1-201,00.html> <April 24, 2007>

<sup>48</sup> Some sources give December 25, 1855 and June 17, 1856 as alternative dates. The writ of *habeas corpus* filed with the court indicated that it was December 20, 1853.

A fascinating and gossipy chronicle of early Salt Lake, written by Nelson W. Whipple, records the rumor that prior to her marriage to Hill, Mary Milam had also been married for just one week to Levi Perkins. As with “W.D.R.”, Whipple may have been accurate in his gossip, because one of his plural wives, Rachel West Whipple, lived just five houses away, in Ward 19, from Levi Perkins and his wife Susan Booth Perkins, in 1860.<sup>49</sup> The two had been married for almost 2 years when the 1860 census was taken. Back in 1852, about when Levi allegedly first married the 13- or 14-year old Mary Milam, he would have been about 29. Since the Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith himself had married four girls 16 or under, thus setting a pattern for the rest of the Saints, pedogamy was not uncommon in Utah’s theocracy.<sup>50</sup> Whipple also relates that after her polygamous sealing to Archibald Hill, she left him for some time and “took a notion to a man named Anderson, a gentile, and lived with him a short time.” She then decided she wanted to return to Hill, “and he, being advised, as he said, by Brigham [Young], to take her back, did so.”<sup>51</sup>

Apparently an unhappy marriage for the young girl, still she bore two children: Emma Elizabeth Hill (born December 29, 1857) and William Francis Hill (born December 23, 1860). On June 10, 1855 Mary’s widowed mother, Elizabeth Case Milam, then remarried to William Wheeler, a convert and gardener by trade from England who had lost his wife while crossing the plains. Hill also worked at the Tithing Office for some 14 years.<sup>52</sup> Sometime in 1865 or so, Archibald Hill was called on a mission to England; he left in 186\_\_ and the 50-year old missionary returned in the Leonard G. Rice pioneer company (along with Nathaniel Henry Felt, Brigham Young Jr. and two of his brothers), arriving back in Salt Lake on October 5, 1867.<sup>53</sup> Hill had come back on the steamer *Manhattan* with some 290 Scandinavian and 190 British LDS converts, with Hill acting as president of the migration company.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> 1860 Census of Salt Lake City, Utah, 19<sup>th</sup> Ward p. 191 (397). Perkins was born in December 1824, but he gave his age incorrectly as 33, not 36.

<sup>50</sup> Four of his 34 known and documented marriages were to girls 14 to 16: Helen Mar Kimball was 14 at their marriage; Nancy M. Winchester was about 14; Fanny Alger and Flora Ann Woodworth were both 16. Joseph Smith was in his 30s. See the list of “Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives,” and the discussion of his wives’ ages in Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, (Signature Books: Salt Lake City, 1997), pp. 4-6, and 11-12. My own unpublished study of the girls who survived the Martin Hand Cart Company also confirms that in the late 1850s, pedogamy was allowed but not necessarily encouraged.



<sup>51</sup> “Copy of the History of Nelson Wheeler Whipple 1818-1887”, 1866, <http://www.clegg-webb.com/Histories/Nelson%20Wheeler%20Whipple%20History.html>, <April 29, 2007>.

<sup>52</sup> See ad for linseed oil available from “A. Hill” at the Tithing Office, *Deseret News*, April 22, 1863, p. 7, and Hill’s obituary, *Deseret News*, January 3, 1900, p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Hansen, Jens, Diary, in Geneva Frost Gilbert, comp., *Our Danish Heritage and Our Temple Work on the Peter Frost Family, 1899-June 1987* [1988], 54.

<sup>54</sup> See *Heritage Gateways*, “1867: Emigration and Other Events”, <http://heritage.uen.org/companies/Wc4859dd6eed7e.htm> <April 25, 2007>; Hill, A. N., et. al. [Letter], *Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 29:30, (July 27, 1867) pp. 473-474.



	
<p><b>Archibald Newell Hill, from his 1900 obituary in the <i>Deseret News</i></b></p>	<p><b>William Francis (Hill) Fairchild, son of Mary Emma Milam and Archibald N. Hill (adopted by Mahlon Dickerson Fairchild)</b></p>

While Archibald Hill was still on his mission, Squire Newton Brassfield came to Salt Lake to “sojourn” for a few months. Upon meeting the unhappily polygamous wife, the two young people discovered they were the same age and both natives of Missouri, and they fell in love. Newton Brassfield then asked May to marry him (perhaps as his bigamist wife). Since no civil authority had legally married Mary to Archibald Hill (the illegal marriage had only been solemnized by ecclesiastical authority) the two felt that no divorce was needed, and Newton Brassfield wanted adopt her two children as his own as well. Under contemporaneous federal law, the two children were technically illegitimate bastards and unable to inherit anything from their biological father, so their legal adoption to Brassfield would legitimate their existence.

On March 28, 1866, Solomon P. McCurdy, Associate Justice of the Territorial Supreme Court, married the two. The Mormons in the territory were outraged by what they saw as a gentile stealing one of their women from the fold, luring her away from her husband and home. However, that day, the intrepid couple went to Mary’s home to pack her a trunk to take with her. As they were leaving the house with the trunk of her belongings, they were stopped by Salt Lake police officers, and Newton Brassfield was arrested for grand larceny.<sup>55</sup> He allegedly resisted arrest as well, and spent his wedding night in jail.<sup>56</sup> In addition, a woman named Jane Slade, refusing to turn them over to their mother, took Mary’s two young children away.

On March 30, 1866, Squire N. Brassfield (or possibly Mary Emma Brassfield) filed a writ of habeas corpus in order for the newly-weds to get custody of Mary’s two children

<sup>55</sup> March 29, 1866 larceny case, Reel 15, Folder 11/034, Salt Lake County Civil and Criminal Case Files, 1852-1887.

<sup>56</sup> Ditto, Folder 11/035 for “Resisting officer”.

by Hill.<sup>57</sup> The writ claimed that Mrs. Jane Slade had “illegally detained and restrained” the children of their liberty.<sup>58</sup> Slade finally relented but only turned them over to the United States Marshal, Capt. J. K. Hosmer. The LDS public was deeply incensed by these actions. Being a non-member native of the state that officially had an extermination order against Mormons was the first strike against Newton Brassfield. Rumors of a wife left in Kansas further alienated Brassfield from the Mormons; his form of bigamy was deeply opposed by the Mormon system of polygamy. But worst of all, Brassfield had courted a “married” Mormon woman while her husband was overseas where he could not defend his polygamous marriage and family.

Countering the Brassfield writ, friends and family of Archibald Hill filed a writ of habeas corpus for custody of the children through the Probate Court, headed by Mormon judge, Elias Smith. The Brassfields hired the services of Major C. H. Hempstead as their lawyer in the growing legal chaos of three trials. Hempstead was able to “quash the indictment” for resisting arrest, but a trial was called for the larceny case, plus the two conflicting custody cases proceeded. The larceny case began on Monday morning, April 2 and continued the following day. In the meantime, at Judge McCurdy’s court for the first case about child custody, Hempstead made the argument that “as Hill had a wife living at the time of the alleged marriage with Mrs. Brassfield, it was illegal and void, and that, as there was no legal father, the mother was entitled to the custody of the minor children.”<sup>59</sup> LDS judge, Zerubabbel Snow, acting as Deputy Attorney General of the Utah Territory and as legal counsel for the “Hill party”, desired further time to prepare his case until Monday evening.

That same busy Monday, the “Hill party” served their writ for custody through the Probate Court of Hon. Elias Smith. When Judge Smith demanded that US Marshal Hosmer produce the two children, he refused to because he had already been ordered by Supreme Court Judge McCurdy to keep them in his custody and not turn them over to anyone else. The LDS judge was incensed and threatened to hold the Marshal in contempt of court, and warned him that unless he produced the two Hill children, he would be thrown in the county jail, which was certainly further evidence that the Mormon justice system was clearly at odds with the US justice system.

McCurdy’s court opened again that night at 7:00 pm to continue the child custody case at Independence Hall. The *Vedette* reported that “After a few preliminary remarks and the filing of some papers, by Judge [Zerubabbel] Snow, the hearing was again adjourned until Wednesday morning, at 10 o’clock.” The court adjourned at about 8:30 pm and US Marshal Hosmer accompanied Newton Brassfield back to his rooms at the National Hotel. As the two men turned the corner by a small building west of the hotel (which may have been William Godbe’s store), Hosmer related in court that

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<sup>57</sup> March 30, 1866, Reel 15, Folder 11/038, op. cit.

<sup>58</sup> “The Habeas Corpus Case”, **DN?**

<sup>59</sup> “MURDER MOST FOUL! ‘The Atonement of Blood!’ – Mormon Law & Mormon Justice!”, *Daily Union Vedette*, April 4, 1866, p. 4.

a man who stood between the big window and door of that building advanced one step from the corner and fired at Mr. Brassfield, the shot taking effect in his arm and side, four buck shot entered the arm, one striking the elbow joint and breaking the arms. The fifth shot, which was much larger than the others, entered his right side. When the gun was fired, Mr. Brassfield fell and said, "O my God! I am shot". He was carried into the International Hotel, where he lingered in agony about 45 minutes and then expired. The assassin, after firing, ran across the street, and turning the corner by the theater, continued in a northerly direction. As he passed the St. Charles Restaurant he was fired at twice by a Policeman. I lost sight of him as he turned the corner of the theater.<sup>60</sup>



**The Salt Lake Theater, near where Brassfield was shot**  
**From Nelson's Pictorial Guide Book: Salt Lake City (1871)**

Along with Brassfield's assassination, the LDS public also expressed great animosity towards the judge who had officiated at the Brassfield-Hill marriage. Fearing for his own safety, on April 8, Judge Solomon P. McCurdy sent a telegram from Salt Lake to Brigadier General P. E. Connor (who was staying at the Metropolitan Hotel in New York) informing the General that:

I married O. [sic] N. Brassfield to a Mormon woman on the 28<sup>th</sup> ultimo. Brassfield was assassinated on the 3d inst. I have been denounced and threatened publicly. Government officials have telegraphed the Secretary of War to retain troops here until others are sent to relieve them. Call on Secretary of war, learn his conclusions, and answer. I feel unsafe in person and property without protection.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ditto.

<sup>61</sup> "Our Friends!" *Deseret News*, January 9, 1867, p. 4.

Upon her groom's death, Mary Emma Brassfield went immediately to Camp Douglas and applied to the commandant for military protection, which was granted her. Despite the legal wrangling over her children, the widow gained custody of her children and she immediately departed for Austin, Nevada, depending upon the mercy of her husband's business partners and friends.

On April 17, the Daily Union Vedette republished an article from the Austin, Nevada newspaper, the *Reese River Reveille* of April 10, offering a reward of \$1150 for Brassfield's murderer. The announcement stated that the whole amount had been raised in just one day, on the 5<sup>th</sup>, which indicated the "excited state of feeling among the Gentiles of Utah. They feel as if they were in danger, as they are confident that the murder was committed by high authority". The article concluded that the "Gentiles, not only residents of Salt Lake, but those of the southeastern portion of our State [Nevada] and travelers passing through, are in danger, and need that a movement be made for their protection."<sup>62</sup>

After Brassfield's murder, Rev. Norman McLeod testified in July 1866 before the Congressional Committee investigating Mormon atrocities, that "the Mormon system...[j]ustifies deception, theft, robbery, when the Gentiles are victims....At present, *the lives of law abiding citizens are threatened even by Brigham's police.*" David B. Stover, the quartermaster for the Ft. Douglas, also testified before the Committee that "'military protection' had to be given 'to many dissenters who desired to leave Utah, but were liable to assassination if the protection had not been afforded."<sup>63</sup>

Mary Emma Milam Hill Brassfield then married New York native Mahlon Dickerson Fairchild on February 5, 1867 in Austin, Lander Co., Nevada. He too was a silver miner in the boomtown of Austin. Mahlon raised Emma Elizabeth and William Francis as his own children and they took his surname. The couple also had four of their own children: Lulla D. (b. about 1868), Mahlon Dickerson Jr. (b. April 1870), May C. (b. about 1872) and Bertha E. (b. about 1874). By 1880, the growing family was living in Georgetown, El Dorado County, Nevada, where the father was mining, and young William Francis worked as a clerk in a drug store. Emma Elizabeth Hill Fairchild married a Kentucky-born German man named Theodore Thomas and by 1900 they were living in Denver, Colorado. Mahlon D. Fairchild Sr. died about April 1913 and his wife, Mary died a few months later, on September 4, 1913 in Denver.

Since Brassfield was murdered very close to the Salt Lake House where Thomas Coleman was working, it is quite possible that he was an eyewitness to the murder and could possibly identify the assassin, while Marshal Hosmer, a non-Mormon and recent resident of the city, was unable to. If Coleman was not a witness to the murder, still it is

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<sup>61</sup> Bancroft's History of Utah 1540-1886, Chap. 22, pp. 627-8; *Deseret News*, November 14, 1866.

<sup>62</sup> "Reward for the Apprehension of the Assassin of Brassfield", *Daily Union Vedette*, April 17, 1866, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> "Our Friends!" *Deseret News*, January 9, 1867, p. 4 (emphasis mine).

very possible that he heard conversations among church authorities about who was responsible for the killing, and thus became “the man who knew too much”.

### **The Assassination of Dr. J. King Robinson**

Dr. Robinson, a non-Mormon native of Maine but most recently a resident of California, was appointed Assistant Surgeon at Camp Douglas in early 1866. In the spring of 1866 (just as Brassfield was assassinated) the non-Mormon physician married Ellen Kay, the daughter of well-loved LDS dentist and polygamist, Dr. John Moburn Kay, who had died two years earlier while on a mission in London. The 18-year old Ellen and her mother, Ellen Crocroft Kay, had left the church after Dr. Kay’s death (apparently over Dr. Kay’s polygamy), yet the LDS community grew very angry that Ellen had married a non-Mormon. Audaciously, Dr. King Robinson then claimed the Wasatch hot springs on the side of Capitol Hill as his since it was unoccupied and appeared to be in the public domain, and he constructed a small building there with the intent to build a bathhouse. The city corporation however claimed it was their property, and the city marshal, Andrew Burt, and a force of armed police officers destroyed the building and ejected the doctor from the property. Robinson then took the matter to court. Although Dr. Robinson actually had a good claim, he still lost the case. Robinson informed the court he intended to appeal.

Two days later, on October 11, 1866, a bowling-alley that Robinson owned was then reduced to rubble by a group of about 25 axe- and sledgehammer wielding men, all in disguise with blackened faces, although Police chief Andrew Burt and two of his subordinates were recognized and they were arrested but later released on bail. On Sunday, October 12, around 11:30 at night, the doctor was summoned from his bed by a man who told him that his brother had fallen from a mule and broken his leg, requiring immediate medical services. Just 175 steps from his home on Main Street, Robinson was struck on the head twice with a sharp object and then shot in the brain. Somehow he survived for about two hours before dying in his young wife’s arms in their home. Despite multiple eyewitnesses (two of whom were only six feet away on a well-lit Main Street), no one could (or WOULD) identify the three attackers. And just as in the case of Coleman less than two months later, the verdict of the Coroner’s Jury was that the deceased had been killed at the hands of persons known.<sup>64</sup>

The young hot-tempered and Harvard-educated lawyer, Robert Newton Baskin, was visiting Utah after the civil war, on his way to California. It was during his visit to Salt Lake that Robinson was shot down in the streets. Upon viewing the physician’s body, Baskin vowed "to do all that I possibly could do to place in the hands of the federal authorities the power to punish the perpetrators of such heinous crimes" and decided at that moment to remain in Utah. In the words of Brigham D. Madsen, “Mormon theocracy thereby acquired its most dedicated enemy.” [Robinson was Baskin’s client??]

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<sup>64</sup> Bancroft's History of Utah 1540-1886, Chap. 22, pp. 627-8; *Deseret News*, November 14, 1866.

Since Dr. Robinson was killed downtown on Main Street between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> South, and Coleman was the attendant of the Salt Lake House at 143 So. Main Street, I speculate that Thomas Coleman was one of the eyewitnesses to this murder and had decided to testify against the assailants. Note that the m. o. is the same in Robinson's murder and Coleman's murder. They were both called out on an urgent errand. Robinson only got a few yards from his home before he was beaten and shot. Having learned from Robinson that too many witnesses were present, for Coleman's murder, the vigilantes waited until Coleman got way out of town and then he was murdered and carried back to Capitol Hill where his body and the affixed note could be found. If this is the case, then responsibility for Coleman's murder must lie with Chief of Salt Lake Police, Andrew H. Burt. Burt certainly had the means and ability to set up Coleman, the quick burial and immediate inquest.

But in any case, some accountability for the brutal murder of Thomas Coleman also lies at the feet of Brigham Young, who instigated and propounded the blood atonement "doctrine" for miscegenation between whites and blacks. Having made such brutish, hateful, and prejudiced theological statements in a public forum allowed Burt, Rockwell, and/or other similar rogue Mormon vigilantes literally to get away with murder by cloaking it with prophetic authority and public racist sentiments of the era. Thomas Coleman's spilled blood somewhere west of downtown Salt Lake still cries out for the guilty to be held accountable to the demands of justice.