

Our First LDS Ancestors

The Lives of William Van Orden and Julia Ann Haight Van Orden 1804-1844

by

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Written in 2004, the 200th Anniversary of William's Birth



This year we celebrate our common ancestors: William Van Orden and his eternal companion, Julia Ann Haight Van Orden. William was born in 1804 and Julia Ann eleven months later in 1805, both in New York State. Together they joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1839, also in New York, and raised their posterity in their new faith. Tens of thousands of their posterity now “call their name blessed” for gathering to the fold of Christ early in the Restoration.

William Van Orden descended from a long line of New York Van Ordens whose roots in America date back to 1623. His father, Peter Van Orden, was born on the family farm on the west bank of the Hudson River in the Embought (earlier spelled Imbogt) region of Catskill, Greene County, New York, on 19 February 1761.¹ The Embought was a set of foothills of the nearby Catskill Mountains to the west. As originally Dutch-speaking citizens of New York, the Van Ordens and other Dutch and European-American relatives into whose families they had married served as leaders of the Imbogt from its settlement in the 1670s. They were faithful members of the Dutch Reformed Church. Peter himself was christened as “Pieter” in the Catskill congregation a few weeks after his birth.²

As a teenager, Peter served as a scout for the New York militia in the American Revolution. He was often referred to as Captain Peter Van Orden thereafter. Around 1800 Peter purchased 200 wooded acres on Windham Mountain, westward in Greene County, in the Catskills along the path that would become the major avenue for travel over the mountains by New Englanders and New Yorkers eager to settle western New York, that is before the creation of the Erie Canal. Before the Revolution, most of New York west of the Hudson had been controlled by the Iroquois Indians, but in the early nineteenth-century, tens of thousands migrated to spots throughout all of New York.³

Peter built a rustic inn on Windham Mountain that he called the “Mountain House.” The area was known as East Windham and was located in Durham Township. That region of the Catskills was still populated with bears, wildcats, and panthers when Peter settled in the mountains. He aided many travelers through the difficult region in the early days. Peter’s property developed into a prosperous homestead producing hay and grain and stocked with many animals.

Peter’s first child born in the mountains, who was also named Peter, later wrote of his father’s generosity toward travelers:

Living where he did, [my father] had a great chance to know the toils and troubles of the early emigrants to reach their locations beyond the mountains, many of which I have heard him relate, and of his own privations and labors and incidents of the first years that he spent there in the woods. Many times he was called upon by people after dark, who were in trouble, travelling to their home beyond the mountains, with a tired team, in a

¹ My information on Peter comes from a typescript entitled “Life of Peter Van Orden” by Barbara Van Orden, n.d., Catskill, New York. Regarding the Van Ordens and their relatives in the Imbogt and Catskill, I have drawn from Claire L. Ross and Edward R. Kozacek, *Greene County, New York* (Catskill, NY: Catskill Enterprise, 1976), Chapters 5 and 6.

² Royden Woodward Vosburg, “Church Records in Greene County, New York,” (N.p.: The New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 1919-1921), 11.

³ “Early Greene County History” on the worldwide web at <http://www.hopefarm.com/greeneny.htm> Ross and Kozacek, Chapter 6.

muddy road, and dark woods. He would get up his ox team and go and “haul them in,” as they expressed it—taking hold of the bow of his near ox and feel his way in the dark through the mud and woods; women crying and wishing for their old homes, children tired out and asleep in their wagons. Sometimes the rooms of his log house would be so filled with tired-out emigrants in the night, trying to get a little rest and sleep, that he could hardly find a place to put his feet without stepping on some one.⁴

Peter’s first two wives died and left him six children to raise. On 15 July 1804, Peter married widow Mary Crooker Carbine, who already had four children. Mary Crooker was born in 1774 a few miles north of the city of New York. Her parents and grandparents had lived on Long Island, New York. Mary’s third child, Edmond Zebulon Carbine, was a close half-brother to our William Van Orden and became a Latter-day Saint as well. Edmond was six years older than William. Peter and Mary Van Orden’s first of eight children was our William, born 15 November 1804, in East Windham. He was conceived prior to the marriage of his parents.

William was christened in the same Dutch Reformed Church as his father. The rite took place on 15 February 1805 in Catskill. His Van Orden grandparents were the witnesses.⁵

Both William and his future bride Julia Ann Haight grew up in the Catskill Mountains and probably knew each other throughout most of their young lives.

Julia Ann Haight was born to Caleb Haight (1778) and Keturah Horton (also 1778), on 6 October 1805 in Windham, Greene County, New York. Caleb Haight and Peter Van Orden were friends, both living in the Catskills. Julia Ann’s ancestors had been early settlers of Massachusetts and New York.

Two of Peter Van Orden’s children married two of Caleb Haight’s children. Our William Van Orden married our Julia Ann Haight on 12 March 1827, and Julia Ann (strangely her given names are the same as our Julia Ann) Van Orden married Hector Caleb Haight on 18 December 1829. William and Julia Ann’s daughter, Mary Helen, indicated that William and Julia Ann’s wedding took place in Mountain House.⁶ Again according to Mary Helen, the eventual children of these two couples looked very much alike as “double cousins.” The other Hights were also close to the Van Ordens.⁷ The Hights and Van Ordens in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hail their familial relationship to the present day.

The entire Haight family along with at least two of Peter Van Orden’s children (William and Julia Ann) made their way to Sempronius Township (changed to Moravia Township in 1833), Cayuga County, New York between 1828 and 1830. Moravia was about 120 miles west of East Windham. This was part of the adventurous westering movement of the time. William actually purchased his 100 acres of farm land from Francis Carbine on 11 March 1829 for \$1,450.00.⁸

⁴ As cited in Henry Hedges Prout, *Old Times in Windham* (Cornwallville, NY: Hope Farm Press, 1970), 103-04.

⁵ Royden Woodward Vosburg, 66.

⁶ “Incidents in the Life of Mary Helen Grant,” *Journal of History* 10 (1917):170.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ As researched by Loren Fay, a Cayuga County historian, in Cayuga County Deeds, Vol. JJ:477.

William became a prosperous farmer in Moravia Township and Cayuga County. He was active in county politics as justice of the peace and bore the names of “the Squire of Moravia” and “William Van Orden, esq.”⁹

William and Julia Van Orden had eight children. The oldest, Charlotte, was born 13 January 1828 in East Windham before they left. Each of the others was born in their farm home in Sempronius, which after 1833 was Moravia. These were Peter Edmund (27 January 1830); Mary Helen (27 December 1831), Everett Clark (2 January 1834); Eliza Dorleska (2 November 1835, also known as Dorlesky, died as an infant 29 February 1836)¹⁰, Sarah Louisa (25 September 1836); Marie Antoinette (3 April 1839); and William Arthur (18 May 1841).

Mormonism entered the lives of the Van Ordens and Haight and other Moravia families in the winter of 1838. Isaac C. Haight, son of Caleb Haight and future leader of the Church in Utah, left a memoir of those days when a Mormon elder, Pelatiah Brown, came to the community. Isaac was twenty-three in 1838. He remembered: “About this time I had much reflection on the situation of the Christian churches. I found that they had departed from primitive purity and that they were corrupt.” He then added, “In this state of mind I was found by a preacher of the Gospel by the name of Pelatiah Brown.” Elder Brown taught Isaac and presumably others about the “apostasy of the Primitive Church,” the taking away of the priesthood, and the setting up of the Kingdom of God again on the earth “with all the gifts and graces with all its power and blessings.” Isaac indicated that “after close investigation I became convinced that God had set up his kingdom on the earth again and on the third day of March 1839 I and my wife were buried in the waters of baptism for the remission of sins.” How soon other Haight, the Van Ordens, and a few other families joined the Church is unclear, but Isaac related that Elder Brown and he set up a branch in Moravia in the spring of 1841 of about forty members. “I had the happiness to see my father, mother, one brother and two sisters [one of these would surely have been Julia Ann Haight Van Orden, our ancestress] baptized into the new and everlasting covenant. Isaac Haight was left as the presiding elder of the branch.”¹¹

Mary Helen, a daughter to our William, reported that all the baptisms took place in nearby Owasco Lake, one of the Finger Lakes, located two miles westward from the Van Orden farm.¹² Isaac Haight said that when he and his wife were baptized, they had to walk a quarter mile in the freezing cold to get a change of clothes.¹³

Many of the Moravia and West Niles (a nearby community just to the north) Saints must have been likewise baptized in 1839, because Elders Brigham Young and George A. Smith of the Twelve Apostles visited them collectively in Moravia in late November and early December 1839.¹⁴ These two apostles were visiting a number of branches in upstate New York soliciting

⁹ From typescript entitled “William Van Orden the Squire of Moravia,” n.a., n.d; also from an account book found at the Cayuga-Owasco Historical Society, Moravia, New York.

¹⁰ I discovered Dorleska’s headstone information in “Hewitt Cemetery,” located near the Van Orden home, on the worldwide web at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~nycayuga/cem/cem139.htm>. She is recorded as “Eliza D. (Dorleska), dau. of Wm. & Julia A. Van Orden, d. Feb 29, 1836 ae 4 mo.”

¹¹ “Isaac C. Haight Journal,” located in the Latter-day Saint Historical Archives (LDSHA) in Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹² “Incidents in the Life of Mary Helen Grant,” 171.

¹³ “Isaac C. Haight Journal.”

¹⁴ See *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1956), 4:39, 44. The entry for 3 November 1839 reads: “Elders Young and George A. Smith went to Brother Isaac

funds for their mission to Britain. Mary Helen recounted, “Brigham was very sick there for a week or more. George A. Smith did not have an overcoat and it was very cold weather. He had a piece of patchwork quilt folded cornerwise and wrapped around his shoulders. Father [William] had some ‘full cloth’ as they called it, homemade of course, and he had two young ladies, tailoresses, Mary and Abigail Thorn [also members of the Church], come to the house and make an overcoat for him.”¹⁵

The Joseph Thorn family, all members of the Church, lived in the village of Moravia itself. Joseph was a local blacksmith. Reportedly, many of the Church meetings took place in his house. Benjamin Allee, a local newspaperman, reported, “I attended some of their meetings at Thorn’s house. They were quite interesting. As soon as a person joined them they were appointed to some office in the church.”¹⁶

In the spring of 1841, Isaac C. Haight went on a short-term mission back to Greene County, New York, where he had grown up. He wrote in his journal: “I labored there about three months, broke down much prejudice and baptized my cousin, Mr. Carbine [Edmund Z. Carbine, half brother to William Van Orden]. Many others believed but were not quite ready so they put it off until another time. And being directed by the spirit I bade them farewell and returned home feeling I was wanted there.”¹⁷

When he returned to Moravia, Isaac found that the branch had engaged in “the bad use of the gift of tongues,” but that “they were soon restored to peace.” He decided that it was time for the Moravia Branch members to “gather” to Nauvoo, where the Saints were coming together under the command of the Lord. Not all were ready immediately, but they planned to go later. As Isaac stated, “Accordingly I, with some others, set about getting ready to go and dwell with the Saints in Zion. Started June 7th [1841].”¹⁸ Isaac quickly fell into favor with Church leaders and thereafter was considered a stalwart in the faith. He also brought with him \$145.00 from the West Niles (or Moravia) Branch members for the temple fund.¹⁹

By 1843, the other faithful Saints from Moravia were ready to gather to Nauvoo. Isaac had gone back to retrieve his parents, other Haight family members, and others. Isaac reported that they left on 13 September.²⁰ The newspaper reporter and observer, Benjamin Allee, wrote, “[Joseph Thorn] joined the number going to Nauvoo Illinois with Spencer Covert, Isaac C. Haight, Mr VanOrder [sic], Dorr Curtis and others with their families, each one having a large covered wagon, Thorn lashing his big blacksmith bellows on the back of his wagon, thus traveling by land all the way.”²¹ According to William and Julia Ann’s daughter, Mary Helen, the Van Ordens and the Hights sold their farms in Moravia for a good price.²² Actual records show that William sold the farm for \$3,000.00, indeed a good price, to Warren Austin.

Haight’s at Moravia.”

¹⁵ “Incidents in the Life of Mary Helen Grant,” 171.

¹⁶ As cited in Leslie L. Luther, *Moravia and Its Past and Adjoining Towns* (Indianapolis: F. Luther Co., 1966), 58.

¹⁷ “Isaac C. Haight Journal.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Moravia and Its Past and Adjoining Townships*, 58.

²² “Incidents in the Life of Mary Helen Grant,” 173.

On 27 September the wagon train entered Kirtland, Ohio, the former gathering place of the Saints. Isaac exclaimed that “for the first time [we] gazed upon the Lord’s House with delight and admiration” and that they were kindly received by the local Church authorities still in Kirtland.²³

Julia Ann’s mother, Keturah Haight, had suffered from blindness for many years and was extremely feeble on this trip. Up through Kirtland, Keturah had traveled in the wagon on a bed. But in northeastern Ohio, Isaac Haight decided to accompany his mother by canal and then river to Nauvoo. Isaac related, “Our friends left us with heavy hearts not knowing if they would ever see Mother again alive as she was now sometimes delirious.”²⁴

Mary Helen Van Orden remembered that her grandmother Keturah Haight was eager to find the Prophet Joseph Smith, “as she believed if he would administer to her she would receive her sight.”²⁵ Isaac reported that he and his mother arrived in Nauvoo on 15 October 1843. “Mother is quite feeble and it rejoices my heart that she can rest from her long journey. And now, having arrived safely at home in the city of the Saints, I feel to rejoice as one day spent with the people of God is worth thousands in the world.”²⁶ Mary Helen stated, “In a few days Brother Joseph came and administered to her and she received the desired blessing of her sight restored, which lasted as long as she lived and was a great comfort to her.”²⁷

The other members of the Moravia Branch company, including the Van Ordens, still traveling overland, probably most of the time on the National Road, arrived in Nauvoo on 27 October 1843. Keturah Haight was thrilled to *see* each of her grandchildren, some of them for the first time.²⁸

Upon arriving in Nauvoo on the Mississippi River, William and Julia Ann and their family first rented a house. They then bought from Joseph and Isabella Horne a story-and-a-half red brick house on Mulholland Street about a half mile east from the temple site. Amazingly, this house still stands (we at least believe it to be the house), and is a special site for Van Orden and Haight pilgrims to Nauvoo. “It was quite a nice house for those times. He [William] also bought one hundred sixty acres of land about three miles from the city which he rented to his half brother, E. Z. Carbine.”²⁹ Other records indicate that William also owned an additional twenty acres of farmland outside Nauvoo.

Nauvoo already had about 11,000 inhabitants by the time the Van Ordens reached Nauvoo. It was bustling with new convert arrivals that included many immigrant members from England. The city already rivaled Chicago as the largest city in Illinois. Sadly, the Latter-day Saints were already hated by a majority of the other residents in western Illinois because Nauvoo had long since outstripped Warsaw, also on the Mississippi, and Carthage in their Hancock County and Quincy farther to the south as a commercial center.

²³ “Isaac C. Haight Journal.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ “Incidents in the Life of Mary Helen Grant,” 173.

²⁶ “Isaac C. Haight Journal.”

²⁷ “Incidents in the Life of Mary Helen Grant,” 173.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, “Isaac C. Haight Journal.”

²⁹ “Incidents in the Life of Mary Helen Grant,” 173-74.

Based on a list of his belongings at his death and estate papers, William could also have plied the trades of tanner, shoemaking, and leatherworking. He possessed fourteen pounds of tallow, twenty-five pounds of sole leather, two sides of upper leather, and one calfskin. (See the history of Julia Ann Haight Van Orden by Dell Van Orden on this CD.)

In 2002 prominent Latter-day Saint historian Glen M. Leonard completed his *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise*. A few different quotations from Leonard indicate well the Nauvoo setting in which the Van Ordens found themselves in 1843 and 1844:

“Every immigrant arriving in Nauvoo after 1840 and every visitor, too, it seems, noticed the same thing about Nauvoo. The city was growing, and growing rapidly. Wherever they looked, newcomers found the sights and sounds of buildings under construction.”³⁰

“Construction and crops would be the keywords in Nauvoo’s economy. Commerce and crafts supported the task of providing basic human needs in an economy based on an agrarian credit system. Whatever their hope for societal change, the people of Nauvoo would maintain the agrarian lifestyle of traditional society.”³¹

“As with other activities for the Latter-day Saints, the very task of housing and feeding a family in Nauvoo acquired a religious meaning. The Saints saw themselves as God’s people of the covenant, eligible for the biblical promise of life’s necessities if they lived righteously.”³²

“It was a speculator’s dream fulfilled, but the promoters of Commerce and Commerce City [earlier] had not realized it. It took a religiously motivated people intent on gathering to sacred places to turn the steamboat landing at the head of the rapids into a real town. By 1843, Nauvoo was beginning to look like an expansive city.”³³

“The agrarian dream of American Saints likewise seemed attainable at Nauvoo. For all the Saints so attuned, agrarianism and millennialism were parallel dreams, yet, when pressed, they would give precedence to their religious dream of a special people and place. Nauvoo was first of all a religious sanctuary from the world doomed to destruction and only secondarily an agrarian Eden, although the latter-day Saints typically failed to distinguish between the two in their predilection for subsuming the secular into the sacred.”³⁴

“To a certain extent, every migrant to Nauvoo was a farmer. For some that meant a garden in the backyard. But for many acreage outside the city demanded attention and qualified them as true agriculturists.”³⁵

“Unless the owner of small, individual farms hired extra help, which many of them did, a farmer and his older sons could open the larger farms to cultivation only gradually. The process of turning the fertile but heavy clay soil of the prairie was slow, because neither the old wooden

³⁰ Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2002), 123.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 130.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

plows nor the newer ones made of cast iron would scour—the moist much would cling to the plows. It took at least three yoke of oxen or three teams of horses to break through the tough roots of prairie grass.”³⁶

“Nauvoo, like small-town America everywhere, functioned economically in an agrarian model that celebrated the household as the unit of production for many needs. Each family sought self-sufficiency. Any land not developed for housing within Nauvoo’s city boundaries and suitable for crops was turned to residential agriculture, if the owner was willing. Some craftsmen traded their wares for the foodstuffs needed by their families, but even these families kept a backyard garden usually tended by the wife, and many of them kept small farms. One shoemaker, for example harvested four acres of corn and a one-acre garden in 1843 and increased his farm to double the corn plus ten acres of wheat the following year.”³⁷

Joseph Smith visited the Van Orden family many times. “How I admired him,” remembered Mary Helen. “I thought him the grandest and most handsome man in the world. It seemed so wonderful for a prophet of God to be in our home.”³⁸ William was ordained to the office of Teacher in the priesthood upon his arrival in Nauvoo. This meant that he undoubtedly served as a “Teacher” in visiting various homes in Nauvoo, similar to the practice of home teaching in the Church today.

William was a member of the Nauvoo Legion. He spent every tenth day working on the temple besides taking his turn guarding the Prophet. Not long after arriving in Nauvoo, William met with Joseph Smith to settle his tithing. Not only did William pay the hefty sum of \$360.00, he also gave one-tenth of his horses, cows, and sheep. One of the horses was named “Charlie,” which later became Joseph Smith’s favorite horse. Joseph Smith also borrowed quite a bit of money from William Van Orden. Property and estate records reveal that William was one of the wealthiest men in Nauvoo. Hardly anyone had any money to lend. We read in Joseph Smith’s official history that the Prophet went out to the Van Ordens and repaid a \$100.00 debt.³⁹ After the Prophet’s death and also after William’s death, Lorenzo Snow borrowed \$500.00 from Julia Ann in an effort to save the Nauvoo Charter. The effort failed. Julia Ann Van Orden never recovered any money that she loaned to the Church. The Van Ordens were still relatively wealthy in 1844, but the widow Julia Ann later had little money.

Joseph and Hyrum Smith were slain on 27 June 1844, 160 years ago. William Van Orden took his turn along with many others of the Nauvoo Legion to guard the bodies the first days and nights that they were back in Nauvoo. William took a severe cold and otherwise became deathly ill. He died a few days later on 11 July 1844 from “bloody flux.”⁴⁰ Bloody flux is defined in older medical journals as diarrhea or dysentery in which blood is mixed with the intestinal discharge. William was buried in the cemetery two miles east of Nauvoo. The “Old Pioneer Cemetery” has come into the hands of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and has been restored.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁸ “Incidents in the Life of Mary Helen Grant,” 174.

³⁹ *History of the Church*, 6:424.

⁴⁰ I discovered recently in the “Nauvoo Death Records Kept by the Sexton William Huntington” located in the LDSHA that William’s actual death date was on 11 July. Previously family members had used dates anywhere from 1 July to 14 July.

We descendants of William Van Orden and his eternal companion Julia Ann Haight Van Orden desire to bring these wonderful people out of obscurity and darkness. We love them and wish to honor them for their example and sacrifices. In large measure because of them, we now have the restored gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives.

Dell Van Orden has written a sequel to this history about Julia Ann, which you can find on [the CD made available at the 2004 reunion in Farmington, Utah] which contains this history as well.