



Charles Duncan

Fortunately, a family member found and shared this life sketch of Charles Duncan, and the details it provided were readily verified in primary sources:

Charles Duncan history compiled and written by children of Walter Duncan. Prepared by Leone Duncan.⁷⁹

In Dysart, Fifeshire, Scotland, on January 21, 1823, a baby boy was born to Walter and Isabella Hay Duncan and was given the name of Charles. Charles was the first of ten children.

Charles married Margaret Bowman June 28, 1844, in Kirkcaldy, Fifeshire, Scotland. Margaret was born April 5, 1822 in Kirkcaldy, the daughter of William and Margaret Snaddon Bowman.

Charles and Margaret first made their home in Dysart where Charles worked as a stone cutter and rock mason. Margaret's father became very ill and her mother was bent almost double with a growth in her side, so they moved into part of the Bowman home to care for her parents. Three girls and two boys were born to them in Scotland, but the two boys died.

It was while they were living in the Bowman home that the LDS missionaries contacted the two families and taught them the gospel. The missionaries were always welcome and often received food and lodging at the Duncan and Bowman homes. On 10 January 1848, Charles and Margaret, Margaret's mother and father, and six of her brothers and sisters were baptized in the ocean near their home by J. Currie. Charles and a cousin, John Duncan, did missionary work, passing out literature and holding street meetings.

The Duncan and Bowman families began making plans and saving to come to Zion, but were delayed by the death of Margaret's father on 4 February 1850. Finally in 1852 they felt their dreams were coming true and that they were finally going to America. A few days before they were to sail, Charles was seriously injured while at work when his arm was crushed between two large rocks. He was rushed to the hospital, and the doctors said they

⁷⁹ As published in the 1975 book *The City In-Between: History of Centerville, Utah* by Mary Ellen Smoot and Marilyn Fullmer Sherif.

would have to amputate the arm. Charles felt that he would not be able to make a living for his family without his arm and would not consent to the amputation, saying he would die first. The doctors took several pieces of bone and flesh out and patched it up as well as they could. Margaret wanted to take her luggage off the boat, but Charles insisted that she must go with the rest of the family or she might never get to Zion. The morning the ship was to sail, the doctor told Charles that gangrene had started in his arm and that he could live only a few days. Knowing that his wife would not leave without him, and not wanting her to know of his serious condition, he asked to be put on the boat. Thus, on the 10th day of January, 1852, Charles and Margaret Bowman Duncan and their three daughters, Margaret Bowman, Archibald Bowman and his family, and John and Eliza Bowman Duncan sailed on the *Kennebec* bound for America.

The first evening at sea, after the Elders had administered to Charles and everything possible had been done for his comfort, Margaret sat by his bedside asking the Lord for help and guidance. The answer came to her very clearly in every detail. She told Charles about it, and after getting the permission and a promise of help from the Captain, she set out to follow the Lord's instructions. Charles was dressed and wrapped in a heavy woolen quilt, leaving only his injured arm free. He was then placed in a lifeboat and securely fastened. He became frightened and begged not to be put in the water saying that he expected to be buried at sea but not while he was still alive. Trying to reassure him, Margaret got into the boat with him. She removed the bandages from his arm as the boat was lowered into the water, and his injured arm was left hanging over the side of the boat so that the cold salt water could wash over it. He cried out with pain, and Margaret, although frightened herself, held tightly to him reassuring him that everything would be all right. At a given signal, they were brought up out of the water, their wet clothing removed, and Charles was put in a warm dry bed. His arm was again bandaged, and he fell asleep exhausted – the first natural sleep he had had since the accident. The next morning his arm looked better, and the treatment was repeated day after day. Several pieces of bone worked out of the arm. When they arrived at New Orleans his arm had completely healed, and he was able to help unload the boat. Although his arm was smaller, it was strong and never gave him any trouble nor interfered with his work.

When the ship sailed there were enough provisions on board for twenty-eight days. Soon it was discovered that the trip would take much longer, and the food was rationed. There was much sickness on board, and it was fifty-two days after sailing before they finally reached New Orleans.⁸⁰ They went directly to St. Louis.

While in St. Louis an epidemic of cholera broke out. Margaret had received training as a nurse while in Scotland, and the authorities in St. Louis set her apart as a midwife and nurse to care for the sick during the epidemic. She was promised that if she would do this neither she nor her family would contract the disease. Margaret worked night and day while her mother cared for the children, and Charles worked building houses.

Again the family pooled their savings and bought a wagon, six oxen, and a cow. In April 1853 they organized into a company under the leadership of Captain Wilkins and

⁸⁰ The *Kennebec* arrived in New Orleans on March 19, 1852, according to the *Mormon Immigration Index*. See also http://www.immigrantships.net/v6/1800v6/kennebec_saluda18520319.html.

headed West. They arrived in Council Bluffs on 25 May where two more of Charles and Margaret's children died. Isabell died 28 May and Janet on 30 May. Margaret was given a blessing at that time and told to be faithful and of good cheer and they would have a family in Zion, among them twin boys. They buried their little ones, and on 2 June 1853 continued on their journey.

After experiencing the joys and the hardships of pioneer life, they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley 2 September 1853.⁸¹ They were met by William Myers of Centerville whose wife was very ill, and he asked Charles and Margaret to stay with him until they could find a place to live. Margaret nursed the wife, cared for the house and children, and Charles worked wherever work was available or hauled wood from the mountains for fuel.

Charles acquired some land near the mountains on Kays Creek in Kaysville, and the family moved there in the early spring of 1854. He started to build a log cabin, but before it was completely finished, Charles had to devote his time to planting his crops. The family moved into the home even though the windows and doors were not yet hung. On 22 May 1854 a sudden raging blizzard struck the countryside. It was on this day that their twin sons, Charles and John Samuel, were born. During this snowstorm, in their hour of need, Brother Samuel Parrish came with buffalo robes and blankets to hang around the bed to protect the mother and her babies from the cold and the snow that had already begun to drift onto the bed.

The crops failed due to the late storm, and Charles moved his family back to Centerville in July. He bought eleven acres of land from the Parrish's on Parrish Creek, one-half mile north of the town fort. Five children were born to them in Centerville, one of whom died at birth.

When Charles' skill as a stonemason became known, people began to hire him to build homes from the rock that was so plentiful in the Centerville-Farmington area. He taught the trade to his three sons, John, Charles and Archibald, and most of the early rock houses and rock culverts in South Davis County were built by these men. One of the interesting features about some of these old rock homes is that most of the cornerstones are made from granite left over from the construction of the Salt Lake Temple. Charles worked for many years cutting stone for the building of the Salt Lake Temple and he helped lay the rock on the Centerville 1st Ward Chapel.

Charles was one of the men left to burn the homes of the Saints if Johnston's army began to loot them. He also helped to quell the Morrisite trouble.

While Charles was assisting to build the newly founded communities, his wife, Margaret, was doing her part taking care of the physical needs of the people. After coming to Centerville she was set apart by Brigham Young to go among the sick to care for them. For many years she was a midwife, cared for all kinds of sickness, and set many broken bones. Her medicine was made from barks and herbs, some she raised in her garden and others she gathered from the hills. She was a very busy woman, not only in her nursing, but

⁸¹ According to independent research, the Duncan family joined the David Wilkin Company which left on June 1, 1853 and arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on about September 9, 1853 (*Journal History*, dated 15-Jul-1853, p. 2-5, film 1259740).

in caring for her home and seven children.

In 1874 Charles and his sons built a seven-room rock house for the family in Centerville. One room was set apart for Margaret's herbs and her other medical necessities. Their son, Archibald, and his family lived in part of the house to care for the farm and livestock.

Charles Duncan has been described as a very mild mannered, generous and helpful person, always ready to lend a helping hand to others. He read and studied a great deal, especially the scriptures. He never accepted any positions in the Church organizations, but attended to all his religious duties. At one time B.H. Roberts said of him, "If you want any questions answered, an explanation on the Bible or the Church works, ask Charles while he is out in the barn or orchard, but don't ask him to speak in Church."

Faithful and true to the end, Charles Duncan died in Centerville 10 April 1891 and was buried in the Centerville cemetery.