

BIOGRAPHY OF JON PETER AHLSTROM
Written by his daughter Sarah Ahlstrom Nelson

Jon Peter Ahlstrom was a native of Sweden. He was born in Malmo, Sweden April 15, 1836. He was the oldest son of Ole Nielson Ahlstrom and Ingborg Bunderson Ahlstrom. His two brothers were named Magnus Charles and John Ahlstrom. His sisters were Inger Marie and Minnie Ahlstrom.

I don't remember ever to have heard anything about the years Peter Ahlstrom spent in Sweden or of his school days. He learned the trade of a carpenter and cabinet maker before he left the old country.

The Ahlstrom family became converts to the L.D.S. religion about the year 1854 or 1855. They began their journey to American in October 1855.

After leaving their home in Malmi, Sweden they went first to Copenhagen, Denmark where they were joined by other Scandinavian converts until the steamship "Lyon" was ready to take them aboard for Kiel in Slielsing. Then they went by train to Glenkstad where they embarked on another steamship to cross the North Sea. They had a stormy voyage to England and suffered much from sea sickness. They crossed England by train to Liverpool which was the port from which they were to sail for America.

A large vacant hall had been secured where the converts could rest until the old sailship, "The John J. Boyd" was made ready to take them aboard. It was December 12, 1855 that the ship was towed out of the Liverpool harbor with its 508 passengers many of whom were to find graves in the sea, with the death rate being especially heavy among the children.

It was a terrible journey with heavy seas and hurricane weather most of the way. One time the ship was found to be on fire and the passengers nearly strangled in smoke before the flames were subdued. Then one night the "John J. Boyd" collided with another ship and was almost wrecked. The Captain, who was a very cruel man, blamed the collision on to the crew's negligence. The Captain punished the sailors so severely that most of them were disabled. Therefore it seemed a piece of good luck when they sighted a damaged freighter which was slowly sinking in the sea. They steered toward the sinking vessel four days before they were finally able to reach it and rescue the thirty-six sailors who were clinging to the rigging. These sailors were a great help in bringing the "John J. Boyd" to New York after sixty-six days from Liverpool.



The Ahlstrom family landed at Castle Garden, New York February 16, 1856 and on February 21, left by way of Dunkirk, Cleveland and Chicago for Burlington, Iowa. There was no railroad beyond the Mississippi River at that time so the people detrained and walked across the river on the ice. They tied ropes in the handles of their emigrant chests, put their bedding on the

chest, and dragged them across the mighty 'Father of Waters' with the ice creaking at every step. That was March 1, 1856. At that time they believed they were crossing a section of swamp land. Later they realized what their fate might have been had the ice suddenly opened and let the river engulf them.

The Ahlstrom family, not having enough funds to continue their journey further West, halted temporarily in Burlington and went in search of work. The Father, Ole Nielsen Ahlstrom, secured a job felting trees in a forest not far from Burlington. Here he continued to work till June 13, 1865, when he was killed in an accident caused by a falling tree. As he ran to get out of the way of the falling tree he stumbled and fell. The tree which was on the hillside rolled against the top of his head fracturing his skull. This was a sad blow to his widow and the children. They missed his help and loving care but they grieved most deeply because he had not lived to see his hopes fulfilled of reaching Utah and doing his part to build Zion. Peter, being the oldest child, now 21 years old, tried hard to take his father's place. He was employed in a nursery where he worked hard and saved that they might accumulate means to resume the journey to Utah. His brothers and sisters also worked and sacrificed.

On February 21, 1857, just one year after coming to America Peter Ahlstrom was married



to Mary Larsen, a beautiful brown eyed Danish girl who had come over on the same ship as he had. Peter had admired her but he had no personal acquaintance with her. Another young man had always seemed devoted to Mary and she seemed to prefer his company to that of any one else, Peter was therefore surprised to be advised by authorities in the Church to court and marry Mary Larsen that she might not be led away from her religion. Wishing to obey counsel Peter bashfully explained the situation to Mary's parents who urged her to consent. They were married and went to live in a cottage near the nursery where Peter worked. Mary was sure nothing could ever have induced her to give up the religion for which she and her parents had already sacrificed so much but her parents said they would feel better if she belonged to a good L.D.S. man.

Peter was a very likable young man of 22 years. He was average height with light brown hair (that never did turn gray), blue eyes, florid complexion. He was of a jovial disposition, full of jokes and teasing pranks. He had little patience and was very quick tempered but soon over it again. He was honest, industrious and affectionate and always lived the life of a faithful Latter-day Saint.

Their first child, a girl, was born February 12, 1858. They named her Anna Olena. She lived only ten days. The next year March 24, 1859, another baby was born to Peter and Mary Ahlstrom. This baby also had large brown eyes. It was a boy and they named him John Michael in remembrance of Mary's two little brothers who had died on the ship and were buried at sea.

When the baby was just nine weeks old they began their journey across the plains to Utah. Mary's parents had now secured sufficient funds to continue on their way West. Peter Ahlstrom said good bye to his mother, sisters and brothers and started with his wife's relatives

for Zion. His people left Burlington, Iowa the next Spring 1860. They walked all the way to the Salt Lake Valley.

Some years after they arrived in Salt Lake his mother, Ingborg Ahlstrom and her youngest son John Godfery moved to Tooele County. Magnus Charles went to live in Cedar City, Utah. Ingrid Mary married William Asper, one of the architects of the Salt Lake and Manti Temples. His sister Wilhelmina (Minnie) married William Bracken and located in Stockton in Tooele County. The Ahlstroms all had large families and many descendants are now scattered over the inter-mountain region.

Mary's father, Christian Larsen, had a wagon and four oxen. Thirteen people besides Mary's baby belonged to that wagon so they had to walk. When they reached Council Bluffs, Iowa they crossed the Missouri River on a ferry boat. At Florence, Nebraska they joined a large company of Saints. After loading up with supplies they started on their way with a train of seventy wagons drawn mostly by oxen, some cows and a few horses.

A man by the name of James Brown was Captain of their company. It was a long and tiresome journey with many rivers to ford, steep mountain trails to climb and much of the time food was scarce. They saw many Indians and buffalo herds. Peter's young wife Mary walked the entire distance and carried her babe in her arms except when wading rivers.

They reached the Salt Lake Valley August 29, 1859. Pres. Brigham Young advised them to continue their journey south to Sanpete and settle there. They arrived at Fort Ephraim on September 10, 1859. Peter went to work in the harvest fields binding grain, digging potatoes and etc. He also helped haul wood on shares and this secured a supply of fuel for the winter for them. As there were no vacant houses or rooms to be found the young couple dug a cellar in the ground and roofed it over with willows, straw, and dirt. Peter built a fire place and chimney and that was their first house in Utah. The next summer 1860 Peter made adobes and built them a house. It had only one room with flat stones for a floor and a dirt roof but they were very glad to move out of the damp cellar. They were happy because their home had a glass pane for a window where the sun could shine through. They also got a cow, a pig, and raised a garden. Gradually by hard work, they got to be better off so they were better fed and more comfortable.



On September 6, 1861 another son James Peter Ahlstrom was born. That winter was noted for its almost continuous rain. The family, in order to be dry in their beds had to sleep in an outdoor potato cellar which had a tight roof. Their house leaked very much.

In the summer of 1863, during his spare time, Peter made adobes which he sold to other pioneers. Thus he was able to get a few carpenters tools so he could work at his trade. He made door and window frames and simple furniture such as beds, tables, cupboards, chairs and etc. He used the cow shed for a work shop.

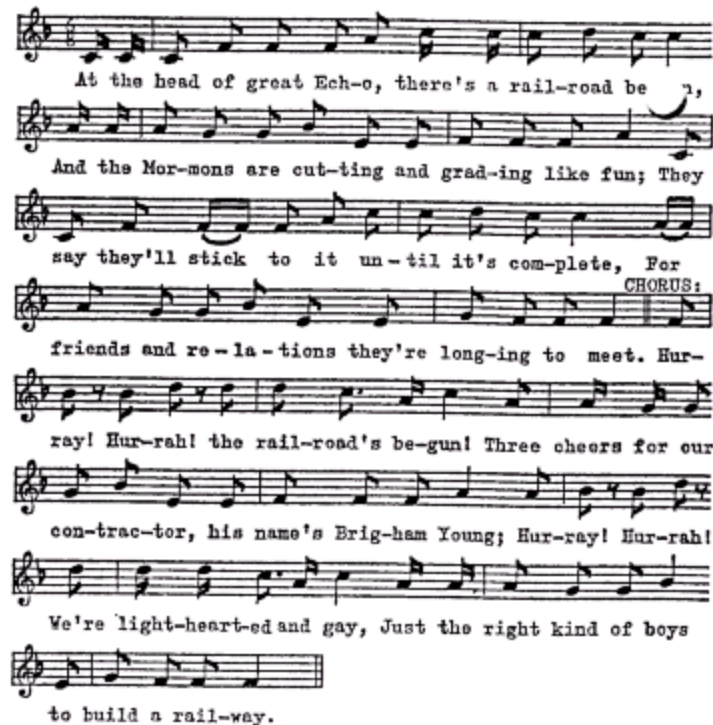
On their seventh wedding anniversary, February 21, 1864 their third son was born. They named him Ole in remembrance of Peter's father who had been killed by a falling tree while they were living in Burlington, Iowa.

In 1865 the Indian war began. Peter Ahlstrom was called out with the rest of the men to go on trips after the Indians or to stand guard. During this time he had to leave his wife and three little boys. It was a time of worry and dread for the people never knew when the savages might be lurking around to steal or kill. Quite a number of persons were killed and tortured and many depredations occurred before peace was finally established.

On September 1, 1867, a fourth baby boy was born whom they named William. At this time great swarms of grasshoppers settled on the wheatfields of Ephraim. Men, women, and children went out to fight the terrible hords of insects with scythes, cradles, hatchets, flails, or butcher knives. The people working frantically were able to save barely enough grain to furnish bread for the winter.

In 1868 a call came for men to go to Echo Canyon to work on the Railroad. Pres. Brigham Young was the contractor. Peter Ahlstrom went as did almost every man in the vicinity. The work was a great blessing to the people. It helped to get the things that were most needed such as flour, shoes, and clothes.

When Peter came back he brought Mary her first stove and also a railroad song which all the men who had been working on the railroad loved to sing.



At the head of great Ech-o, there's a rail-road be - g,
 And the Mor-mons are cut-ting and grad-ing like fun; They
 say they'll stick to it un-til it's com-plete, For
 friends and re-la-tions they're long-ing to meet. Hur-
 ray! Hur-rah! the rail-road's be-gun! Three cheers for our
 con-trac-tor, his name's Brig-ham Young; Hur-ray! Hur-rah!
 We're light-heart-ed and gay, Just the right kind of boys
 to build a rail-way.

The Railroad reached Ogden in 1869 and from then on times were much better. In Sept. of that year sorrow came again to the Ahlstrom family. Their beautiful two year old boy Willie

died. As there were no doctors, the heart broken parents never knew the cause of his death. Peter, himself, made and lined the coffin. Kind neighbors came and helped all they could.

On the 14th of June 1870 another baby was welcomed into the home. It was a daughter and they named her Johanna Marie in memory of Mary's mother who had died soon after reaching Ephraim.

In the summer of 1870 Peter Ahlstrom secured a city lot in the east part of Ephraim on the Mill road. He made adobes and built a fine five room house with a shingled roof and board floors. He also planted a large apple orchard. The family moved in the new home a week before Christmas and was happy beyond measure feeling themselves well-to-do even though only two rooms were furnished.

Then Peter got a job in a furniture shop owned by a man named Uckerman. They made all kinds of furniture, window, and door frames and etc. People were glad to bring produce to trade at the shop for what they needed. Now the Ahlstroms felt that they were prosperous. Real hard times were a thing of the past.

With a good roof over their heads, warm beds to sleep in, a cow, a few chickens, several head of sheep, a number of acres of land to raise hay, grain Peter went home from the shop at night feeling that he might be envied by a king, In his prayers he always thanked God that the missionaries had found him in his native Sweden. He was glad to be in Zion and to help in its upbuilding.

About this time plural marriage was becoming a common thing among the Mormons. They believed it to be a true principle that would bring great blessings if lived correctly. Peter Ahlstrom had an uncle, Victor Bunderson, still living in Sweden with his family. He wrote and urged Peter to send one hundred dollars to help the Bunderson family to immigrate to Utah. Peter felt it his duty to do this. When the oldest daughter arrived from Sweden she went to live at her cousin Peter's home in Ephraim.

She was a fine looking girl of nineteen years, pleasant and a good worker. As time went on he, Peter, came to feel that she would be just the right person for his second wife but he hesitated to ask her because she was about eighteen years younger than himself. Finally Peter persuaded his wife to approach the subject to the girl. To their surprise she accepted the proposal and so in November 1872 he took her to the Endowment House in Salt Lake City where they were married. Peter soon set about finishing the remaining rooms of the house so that each wife could have her private sleeping apartment. It was a coincidence that both wives had the first name of Mary.

The first wife in order to distinguish herself from the other wife took the initial of her maiden name which was Larson. She signed her name as Mary L. Ahlstrom while the second wife signed her name as Mary V. Ahlstrom.

On March 21st in 1873 Mary L. gave birth to a son who was named Charles Delbert and in September of the same year Mary V's first child was born, a daughter, Matilda.

In the autumn of 1874, fourteen men were called from Ephraim to go to St. George to work on the Temple for the winter. Peter Ahlstrom was one of those men and he felt it a great privilege to help build the first Temple in Zion. Toward Spring his family received word that Peter had been injured while over lifting. The hernia he received at that time was a serious handicap to him as long as he lived.



On April 4, 1875 another son came to Mary L. and on May 24, another daughter was born to Mary V. The latest arrivals received the names of Benjamin Franklin and Melinda respectively. Two more babies in the family. It was a time of discouragement with their father unable to work and so many young children to be fed and clothed. The Mothers were sometimes at their wits end to know what to do to provide necessities. Peter owned a small ranch on the west side of the Sanpitch River, so the three oldest boys aged 14, 12, and 10 started to farm the town sheep herd to care for during the summer.

Their Mother couldn't stand for these young boys to be left alone to cook and do for themselves while they tried to farm and herd sheep so she took her cow and chickens and went to live in the cabin that stood on the ranch. She took some dishes and her wash tub with her and plenty of good bedding. She also helped the boys dig a well, and they knocked together some boards to use as a table, a bench and some stools. Mary V. stayed in the home at Ephraim where her third baby girl, Elizabeth was born in July 25, 1876.

The boys with their mother's help raised a good crop and after it was threshed and the sheep herd delivered to its owners in Ephraim, they went back to their home. The boys went to school for a time to a teacher whose name was Action.

On the 15th of November 1877, Mary L. Ahlstrom gave birth to her ninth child. This was her last child, a brown eyed daughter which she named Sarah (Having been told the name meant 'a princess'.)

About this time they started to tear down the hill on which place the Manti Temple now stands. They found that they needed a carpenter and a blacksmith to keep the tools mended and sharpened so Peter Ahlstrom got a steady job there. He built him a shop on the hill which he used while the Temple was being built.

The family was thankful that now Peter had steady work. He worked six days a week and then walked the seven miles to Ephraim on Saturday evenings to spend Sunday with his families.

In December 1878 Mary V. Ahlstrom gave birth to her fourth daughter and the following spring she joined her husband in Manti. She lived in one of the row of small houses which was known as Temple Row. Later they bought a house close to the hill in the Eastern part of town. Peter continued to work on the Temple from December 1877 until the dedication in May of 1888 when he was set apart as caretaker of the building. His duties were multitudinous and the hours

he worked daily would make workers of today think they were much abused. It was his duty to supervise the cleaning of the Temple. A group of women would come each Saturday to clean, under his direction, the rooms that were in daily use. He also had charge of the Temple clothing which was rented out to people who came for ordinance work, to send out the laundry and check it in again, to fill the font for baptizing, to conduct people through the building, and etc.

Peter's work became so arduous with so many stairs to climb during the day and his trips up and down the hill to his home that a vacant room was fitted up for him in the Temple where he slept. He also ate his meals in the Temple. In April 1889 he moved his first wife from the pioneer home he had built in Ephraim to Manti and bought her a home for herself. About that time the U.S. Marshal arrested him on a charge of unlawful cohabitation and he served a term of ninety (90) days in the Utah State Prison. He spent much of his time there in wood carving and brought home many unique and useful articles which he had made with his pocket knife. From a piece of board, for example, he made match safes, rattles, fans and etc.

After the dedication of the Temple Peter Ahlstrom's Mother, who had lived in St. Johns, Tooele County, with her youngest son came to live in Manti so she could do work in the Temple. There she died in April 10, 1894 at the age of 84 years.



By this time Mary V. was the mother of twelve (12) children. Nine girls and three boys. One girl Elnora died of pneumonia when she was about nine or ten years old. Mary L. was the mother of nine children two of whom died in infancy.

Peter Ahlstrom's health continued to fail and on June 12, 1903 he passed away due to what is commonly known as a stroke. He was sixty-eight years old. His funeral services were held in the Council House and he was buried in the Manti Cemetery which is just at the foot of the Temple Hill. He has one son who bears his name, a Legionier, Peter Ahlstrom, who is deputy marshal of the Federal Court with offices in the Post Office Building in Salt Lake City.

Peter Ahlstrom's life was a useful one and may his many descendants follow his worthy example.