

JOHN (JOHNSON) FELT

Written by Myrtle Stevens Hyde, 1966

Compiled from John Felt's own history, the memories of Gustava Felt (son), Joseph Felt (son), J. Earl Felt (grandson), Arthur Felt (grandson), and from a history written by Maggie J. Felt in 1947; with added notes from Gladys Aldous Immerthal, Don Felt, Jr., and from the relatives of John Felt's first two wives. Written by Myrtle Stevens Hyde, 1966

On his ninetieth birthday, 22 June 1909, John (Johnson) Felt gave the story of the first part of his life, and titled it "Life of an Orphan Child." It follows in full, with some added information outside the quotation marks:

"I, John Felt, was born Jun 22, 1819, in the city of Hjø, Sweden. When ten months old I was taken from my mother by an old couple who had no children. No parents were any more loving than they. The man died when I was ten years of age.



John (Johnson) Felt¹

"From the age of twelve to that of twenty my pathway was not strewn with flowers. No relatives known by me save my remembrance but three times. I had one half-sister, older than myself, and only remember seeing her twice; also, a half-brother whom I never saw until old enough to hunt him up. The latter died with consumption when I was but twelve years of age.

"In 1831, as nearly as I can remember, my mother and sister moved to Jönköping. The cholera broke out in that place, and hundreds of people died from the dreaded disease, and it is believed they were among the victims, as I never heard from them afterward.

"In 1840 I enlisted in the army and thought I was in Paradise - nothing to worry about, also food, raiment; and clothed in a glittering uniform, I felt equal to the highest. In the three years of enlistment I perfected my trade as a shoemaker."

He told an interesting story about his becoming a shoemaker. The apprentices to learn the trade were each given an identical slipper, and materials with which to try to make one like it. The slipper was a complicated piece of work, and many of the men gave up trying to study out how to duplicate it. John Felt had almost reached this point, when in a dream at night he saw all the parts of the slipper

and how to put them together, piece by piece. He had no troubles as a shoemaker after that.

It was the custom in the Swedish army at this time, when there was more than one soldier in a company having the same surname, that one would be changed. Evidently this occurred in the case of John (Johnson) Fadlt, the Fadlt being changed to Felt when he came to America.

"At the end of three years, my time being up, I left the army, getting acquainted with a young lady by the name of Bretty Eliza Johnson². She became my wife, she being as well off as myself, having only the clothes we wore on our bodies. Now there was something to think about besides pleasure. She was my equal; we worked together; and the Lord blessed us with the comforts of life. We had six children, of whom only three are living. I worked in the country three years at my trade, but could not make much headway. I again enlisted in the army to better my condition. I received better pay for my labor, and I soon got a very good position. I was soon ordered as a guard with a big arsenal named Lends. I had plenty of work and good pay. I then purchased two houses in a seaport village name Rodersund. One I occupied myself; the other I rented out.

"In 1854 I was out of debt and built great castles in the air, but one day a stranger visited my home. I inquired his business and he began preaching the Gospel to me, telling me he was an Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I had never heard of this religion, or that such a people as the Latter-Day Saints existed. The things I heard worried me a great deal, and many times I wished I had never heard it. But as time wore on, myself and wife, wife's sister and a young man all joined the Church (June 1854).

"In 1855 my time expired in the army. I then sold out my belongings and started for America. I had money enough to pay the immigration of myself and wife, her sister and my father-in-law."

Also with John and his wife were their five children: Charles, Sofi, Tura, Ludvic, and Wilham. Two year old Wilham died on August 22, 1855, after their arrival in Copenhagen, Denmark.

"We left Copenhagen the latter part of November and arrived in Kiel, Germany, the first of December. Before landing, my son William was born on the sailing vessel."

Eleven days later they sailed for America.

"Before arriving at New York my father-in-law died and was buried in the ocean."

John Felt's father-in-law, Jonas Nilsson, had a new sheepskin-lined coat with him on the ship. The ship was used mainly for the transport of cattle, and his sheepskin lining became infested with lice. Since they had or knew no means to get rid of the lice, they threw the coat overboard. He could no longer keep warm, and it happened that he caught a cold, which developed into pneumonia, from which he did not recover.



Left to Right: Son of Jonas Nilsson, John Felt (standing), Jonas Nilsson, and it is believed that the woman is Britta Lisa Jonasson - the daughter of Jonas Nilsson and first wife of John Felt³.
About 1855

Their voyage was not without further mishap either, as John took part in a rescue of thirty-two men at sea.

"After we had been on the ocean about ten weeks we landed safely in New York about the middle of February, 1856. I had means enough to take us to Burlington, Iowa. Arriving there, I was entirely out of means. But with economy, after fifteen months' stay, I had money enough to buy me an outfit to take us on a 1,300 mile journey. We arrived in Salt Lake about the middle of September, 1857."

Their first camping spot was the present site of the City and County Building.

"In the spring of 1858, all the people living north of Salt Lake, as well as those living in Salt Lake, were called to move south, as the United States army was coming. Peace was again restored, and all were allowed to return to their homes.

"About a week after returning to our homes, my wife died (22 August 1858), and left me alone with five children. That was one of my hardest blows in life."

With this he ends his account.

As he needed help in caring for his children, John married (two months after his first wife's death) Britta Anderson. She was a close family friend, and had helped care for his wife during her last sorrowful illness. She was the widow of Lars Carlson, who had died a year before crossing the plains. She had had five children, but four of them died in infancy in Sweden, so at the time of this marriage she had but one son, Claus, who was nine years old. No children were born to John Felt and Britta Anderson.

They settled in Grantsville, Utah, and eventually entered into plural marriage. On June 21, 1862, Stina Kajsa Peterson became John Felt's third wife; they had one daughter, Christina Matilda. He married Kajsa (Kiza) Lisa Stromberg, September

12, 1863, and to them were born six children: Maryett, John, Joseph, Ann Elizabeth, Julia, and Clara. On November 30, 1867, he married Maria Christina Stromberg (called "Mistine," the younger sister of his fourth wife); they became



John (Johnson) Felt
and
Maria Christina Stromberg⁴

the parents of nine children: Hyrum, Josephine, Malinda, David, Oscar, Selma, Gustave, Alfred and Henrietta.

John Felt followed the occupation of shoemaker, but there was not enough demand for his services in this line to keep him busy as desired, so he also ran a herd of sheep, eventually raising the number of the band to a thousand head. He was also part owner in a molasses mill, and being much respected in the community, was a member of the City Council.

The Grantsville settlers found their community frequently visited by Indians. One buck brought a long butcher knife when he came asking for food. John's son, William, used to tell many stories of their experiences with the red men. He bragged that he could do anything the Indian children could do - except eat crickets - but he would crack them for the Indians.

Joseph Felt, John's son who was born in 1869, says,

"In Grantsville we lived on a little narrow street. I've been told that we lived up in the rocks, but I don't remember it."

The Felt farm and range land was on North Willow Creek, some ten miles from town, and included an orchard beside the log house. John also had residences on the north edge of town.

In the spring of 1871 John Felt decided to move to Huntsville, Utah. (His second wife moved to Idaho with her son.) Before leaving he sold his sheep - but never got paid for them, as it turned out.

The journey to Huntsville took three days. While bumping along the rough and narrow road in Ogden Canyon, the wagon tipped over into the river. Josephine was a baby two months old, and in her mother's arms at the time. When the mother hit the water she put one arm down into it to support herself, and held the baby out with the other until she could be rescued. When they got the wagon back onto the road and their meager possessions settled, they went on their way, indeed grateful for their safety.

In Huntsville Kiza Lisa and Mistine, the sister wives, moved into a log house where Dan Felt's home presently stands (address: 216 South 7500 East), each of them having a separate compartment. Stina lived in another house.

John Felt didn't really enjoy mending shoes, so refrained from starting this vocation in Huntsville, though he did make the shoes for his own family, eventually giving his tools to "old man Engstrom."

He bought a fine span of mules that had formerly belonged to Brigham Young, and began to farm. He was a most progressive farmer, keeping up with advances in farming methods. He brought the first buckeye reaper into the valley, also the first binder, and the first mowing machine. He owned a hand-operated hay chopper, and he and Bishop Hammond each purchased a threshing machine at about the same time.

He was extremely economical and completely trustworthy - "his word was his bond." He gave the Felt name a reputation of honesty, so much so that sons and even grandsons were freely given unlimited credit by people who had known him.

John was active with community projects, and in this capacity used his mules to help build the Huntsville mountain irrigation canal.

He tried his hand at various enterprises at different times. He had an interest in a sawmill on Middle Fork for a time; and with Lars Nilson and C. C. Wangsgaard, ran a grist mill for several years until the big one was built in Ogden. Later he entered the dry goods business with Soren L. Petersen and C. F. Schade; this mercantile venture continued until someone tore a hole in the back of the adobe brick building and took a large portion of the goods.

John was a good farmer, worked hard, and expected his wives, sons, and daughters to work just as diligently at their assigned tasks. Along with the children learning a respect for toil and money, an adequate living was earned for the large family. He acquired several tracts of land, and was possibly at one time the most well-to-do man in Huntsville. He was fair even with his animals, took good care of them, fed them well, and "when they did a day's work they were allowed to quit."

He kept a couple of horses, a few pigs, some chickens, a lot of beehives back of his house, a small number of sheep, and eight or ten cows. Every morning one of the town youths would take all the people's cows onto the south hills to graze, blowing his horn when he was ready to go, as a signal for people to turn out their cows. Each evening they were brought back to the edge of town, and the owners would get their own (this was a job designated to one of John Felt's sons).

John Felt was short in stature, being about five feet, three or four inches tall, but was a strict disciplinarian, demanding the utmost in obedience from his children. He was a quick tempered man, quick of action and speech. Probably he acquired these traits during his military years in Sweden; he was a typical soldier, with a back "straight as a ramrod," even as an old man. His son Gustave said,

"He was a very strict man. When he told us to do something we did! I have yet to get a spanking from him; he just had a certain look; I think a spanking would have been better. We were afraid of him. We all worked hard - he saw to that. If I wanted to go to a baseball game or something, I could, but not before I did the work he had for me to do, and he insisted that we do a good job."

He was active in church work, in the Seventies' quorum, and then in the High Priests' quorum, often traveling to the neighboring communities of Eden and Liberty on Church business. In the early days in Huntsville, the Ward was divided into districts - for teaching, collections, maintenance, etc. - and John Felt was in charge of a district. He knew the gospel well, and could converse at length on any facet of it. Prayer was important to him, and family prayers were never neglected in the home. During the 1880's he returned to Sweden twice and filled missions for the Church.

After he returned from Sweden he found himself in the midst of all the controversy about polygamy. Two of his wives were still in Huntsville; his third wife was living in Idaho with her daughter. When the marshals came to take the Huntsville polygamists to prison many of the men would hide, but not John Felt. He did not go to prison, however, because he paid the marshals a fine of \$125.

At this time he bought an adobe home just south of the lovely McKay home, and built barns across the street where David O. McKay's new home is now located. Kiza Lisa moved to this house. After she was settled John tore down the original log house and built the house that Dan Felt now occupies, and this is where John and Mistine lived.

He loved to read, and would often lie in bed with a candle on his chest to illuminate the book he held behind it. Many of the books which were his, and are still in the family, have scorched pages because of this habit.

It seems that he had almost more than his share of vim and vigor. He was never sickly. His grandson Arthur Felt remembers him coming to their house, sloshing through the melting snow without overboots, his shoes soaked, and never catching cold.

He was feeling low, though, just before his son John left for a mission. Earl Felt, his grandson, tells it this way,

"My father, John Felt, Jr., had received his mission call, and when Charles Kramer walked by the house one day right after, he noticed that Granddad was sitting on his porch looking quite downcast. Brother Kramer asked him what the matter was, and Granddad said, 'My son is leaving for a mission and I'm afraid I won't live to see him return.' Brother Kramer declared, 'You shall see him go and return, and then his son go and return!' This prophecy came true. Granddad died about two weeks after I returned from my mission."

He was active until just a few months before his death, even though he lived past his ninety-seventh birthday. He was extremely independent - did not want to be waited on. One time when he was over ninety, he went to Peterson's store (in Huntsville) and bought fifty pounds of flour. The store-keeper said he would deliver it that afternoon. John just looked at the man, patted his should, and said,

"Put it here."

At that, Mr. Peterson exclaimed,

"If you can carry that sack of flour home, you can have it!"

John received fifty pounds of flour as a gift.

All of his wives and half of his twenty-two children preceded him in death. During the last years he lived with his children. His mind was clear, but his eyesight poor, and because of his fondness for books, his children would often read to him. He died September 3, 1916.

NOTE:

The history as written by Myrtle Stevens Hyde in 1966 has not been changed.

History re-typed, pictures and footnotes added by Stephen A. Hansen (3 x great grandson) on 24 January 2010.

History contributed by Gary Felt, Stansbury, Utah.

Footnotes:

1. Source - Scandinavian Jubilee Album 1850 - 1900, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkley
2. Correct spelling is Britta Lisa Jonasson.
Source - family records of Gustave Felt, John P. Johnson, John Felt, Jr., and Russell R. Felt. Hjø Branch LDS Records, Karlsborg Parish Registers, Mofalla Parish Registers and Family Records of David W. Willock.
3. Picture and Source - Family records of Russell R. Felt, Lehi, Utah.
4. Source - family records of Gustave Felt, John P. Johnson, John Felt, Jr., and Russell R. Felt.