

JOHN KNIGHT O'DRISCOLL

(Compiled by LuJeane W. Maxwell)*

**Born 23 December 1845 in Humansdorp, near
the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa to
James O'Driscoll and Rachel Knight**



John Knight O'Driscoll is of Irish and English heritage.

John's grandfather O'Driscoll was a rather well-to-do farmer in Ireland who had four sons. When the sons were in their late teens he called them all together. To the oldest son he gave all his possessions and property. To the other three sons he gave nothing, and sent them out into the world on their own. One son, James, immigrated to South Africa (11).

The British began occupation of the Cape Colony in South Africa about 1795, and beginning about 1820 immigrants began arriving from Ireland, England and Scotland. They were referred to as the British Settlers. Since the Dutch had been there since as early as 1652, they were not too pleased with the arrival of the British Settlers and they began migrating into the interior of the country. The British gradually annexed territory after territory to their holdings in South Africa (13). At that time England was having difficulty in producing enough food for her large population; and its Parliament voted in 1819, partly to relieve poverty in distressed England and partly to increase the number of white inhabitants on the Eastern frontier of the South African Colony...to assist immigration to South Africa. Stories of the fertility of the country and the ease of making a livelihood were greatly exaggerated, and great was the rush to secure passage to the happy land (9). It is little wonder that a young boy like James O'Driscoll would be inclined to sail to this country to find a new home and seek his fortune.

And it was in South Africa that James met and married Rachel Knight whose parents, John and Jane Miller Knight, (7) had immigrated earlier from England where she had been born about 1823. James and Rachel were parents of four boys and two girls:

	Born		Died	
John Knight	23 Dec 1845	Humansdorp, SA	23 Oct 1923	Kamas, Utah
Cornelius	16 Nov 1852	Humansdorp, SA	1920	
Mary	abt. 1854	Humansdorp, SA	1910	
Annie	abt. 1856	Humansdorp, SA	1940	
James	18 June 1859	Humansdorp, SA	1930	
Henry Richard	24 Aug 1867	Humansdorp, SA	4 Dec 1943	Johannesburg, SA

The oldest boy was John Knight O'Driscoll, my great grandfather who was born 21 December 1845 in Humansdorp, Cape of Good Hope, South Africa. His daughter, Susie, writes: "When my father was just a young boy, his father died and he (my father) went to live with his uncle and aunt, Henry and Martha Smith and for many years was known as John Smith and many of his old friends still remember him by that name." (1)

{ It would be good here to know just how old John was when his father died as there are other events that need to fall into place around this information. Originally I had assumed "young boy" meant about 6-8 years, but have since come to feel it may have been about 15 years. }

His young boyhood was spent as most boys in that tropical land, swimming in the ocean, gathering wild honey and fruits, and hunting wild birds and animals. He enjoyed playing with his brothers and cousins and often visited at the home of his aunt and uncle, Henry and Martha Knight Smith (1).

On one of these visits the following occurred:

"The [British] settlers built a stockade as protection from the Kaffirs, a tribe of Negroes, who resented the settlers on their land. They attacked the stockade, [and] after fighting for some time they fled. The men said, 'Let's go after them and settle this thing once and for all.' So all of the men took off after them, leaving no one to protect the settlement. This was a plan to get the men out of the stockade. Then a band of them entered the stockade from the rear and massacred all of the women and children and old men. Only Martha and her children and a few neighbor boys, how happened to be at her home were spared. The leader of the gang recognized Martha as the wife of Henry Smith, who had been good to the blacks and made friends of them. He appointed a guard over them. This spared them the fate of the others. Two of the boys who were at her home were the children of Martha's sisters. They were orphaned by this tragedy. **These boys were John O'Driscoll and James Knight.** These two boys were

adopted by the Smiths and came to America with them and remained with them until they were married.” (7 – 8)

Describing Martha Knight, Myrtle Wilcken says, “She must have been a kind, helpful person, as she and her children along with some of the neighbor’s **little boys who happened to be at her house were spared in the Kaffir Massacre. These little boys were kept and raised with her family, when they were left orphans by this tragedy.** She was a noble woman to do this. She had nine children of her own.” (8)

{ Here again, questions arise:

1. If John was “orphaned” at the time of this raid and went to live with his aunt and uncle, what happened to his mother and his siblings? Were they in the raid or did they live somewhere else? Was this when his father died? Death dates for his brothers and sisters range from 1910 to 1940 on a FGS. No death date for mother found.
2. From Susie Wilde O’Driscoll’s history of John it indicates that “relatives of the family and especially so to Grandmother (Rachel)” received it as quite a blow when John joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (1). And this was in 1865.
3. Also the birth date of John’s youngest brother Henry is given as 23 Aug 1867. This was long after John came to America at age 19; long after his father is said to have died when John was a young boy; and long after John supposedly became an orphan (no parents). If the birth date for Henry was mistyped and should have been 1857 this would have made him about 47 years old when he married in 1890 a woman who was born in 1873. (12)
4. Also in the conclusion of Susie’s history of John which was written in 1938 it states, “None of father’s family ever came to this country and he never had a chance to return to see his mother much as he wished to? (1)
5. Where were his mother, father and siblings at the time of the massacre?
6. The term “orphan” and “adopted” might have been used loosely in these histories. Very likely the aunt and uncle merely took the boys and raised them as their own because of the circumstances.

Further research here is needed.}

The place John lived with the Smith’s is described as being on the seashore and his uncle “Henry owned a fishery and a number of boats. He owned a mercantile business and was well-to-do and energetic.” (7)

“The missionaries (although they met with so much opposition from many of the people) were always made welcome at the Smith home and spent much of their time there. The family (**including John**) was finally converted and baptized members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. This was quite a blow to relatives of the family and especially so to Grandmother.” {Rachel Knight O’Driscoll} (1). Along with his aunt and uncle and family, John was baptized in

1865 after being converted by a Mormon Elder, Henry Dixon (10), and Minor G. Atwood and William Fatheringham. (1)

“Of course members were urged to join the saints in Utah. Henry sold all of their worldly goods for passage for himself, eight children and the **two adopted cousins**. They gave up their beautiful home, servants and livelihood and came to Utah in 1865 for the gospel.” (7) They came to America traveling first by ox team from Humansdorp to Port Elizabeth, South Africa; and sailed with a group of 47 saints on the “Brig Mexicano” on 12 April 1865 —“the last ship of converts to leave from Africa for many years as the mission was [then] closed.” “The voyage took two months and six days. At one time... for three days... they could not sail at all... there was not even enough wind to fill the sails and they were just at a ‘standstill’. And the heat was terrible.” (1) However, John did not get seasick because “he had spent so much of his time in and around the ocean it did not bother him.” (1) The ship arrived “at New York June 18 at Castle Garden New York. (Church Chronology by N. Jensen). In New York they boarded a train and went to Saint Joseph, Missouri. From there they traveled by boat up the Missouri River to Wyoming, Nebraska. They were in Nebraska for “33 days for them to buy supplies, wagons, oxen and food to prepare for the 1000-mile journey to Utah” with the Minor G. Atwood wagon train. John drove seven yoke of oxen all the way to Salt Lake Valley.

“Some men who were not members of the Church had oxen and wagons to sell. The oxen were very poor grade, also the wagons, so Henry Smith would not buy from these men, but went down the river and bought two fine yoke of oxen and a very fine wagon. The men who had the poor grade stuff to sell were angry and refused to let Henry Smith travel with the group. The leader cursed Mr. Smith and told him he would never reach Salt Lake.”

“It was later proven that these men were buying poor grade oxen and wagons and selling them for a big profit at the expense of the Saints. Henry Smith had used oxen in Africa; therefore, he knew a good one when he saw it. Also he knew what a good wagon was like. Being refused the privilege of traveling with the group, he said, “We’ll travel alone.” They did. The captain of the group was Welles and the company was the Welles’ Company. They crossed the plains in 1865.”

“Two incidents were told... which occurred while in route to Utah. While traveling they saw a dead ox. Mr. Smith said, “We’ll stop and skin it.” **The two young men (the ones who had been at the Smith house at the time of the massacre {John Knight O’Driscoll and his cousin James})** said, “What are you going to do with it? He replied, “It might come in handy.” Later on, the wagon broke. Mr. Smith mended it with a cedar stick he had carried along just for such emergencies and by wrapping cut strips of rawhide around the broken

part, spliced by the cedar stick; the mend was as good as new. After arriving in Salt Lake, Henry Smith let his wagon go, along with the oxen, to assist people who wanted to come to Utah, and were not able to buy wagons or oxen for themselves. This wagon made several trips across the plains and the mended parts stayed solid as ever."

"Another incident occurred on this trip, also. One day the company saw smoke in the distance. They sent some men to investigate, thinking the Indians had attacked the Smiths. A company on [sic] way to Oregon had been killed and their wagons burned. The Smiths passed this place, too, but safely." (8)

The grand daughter of one of Henry's children quotes from a letter written by her grandfather to his wife in 1893 telling of his memories of this journey. "I feel almost like Rip Van Winkle minus his dog, when I think of crossing this country when Denver was a frontier settlement, about a hundred people on the border of the Platte River. The surrounding country was a hunting ground, where wolves and prairie dogs made the night hideous with their howling and barking. Where on the road to Pikes Peak, men and women were scalped and murdered by the red devils that reigned supreme. It was not far from here, where the Indians attacked that Danish train, and where you remember, you had to get in the wagon and not be seen, when we passed through that grove of trees, where those devils had just been. That night we had to camp on a hill without water, tired and thirsty, and guard our camp. All this being in the past and almost forgotten, but still dear to our lives." (7)

From Susie's story: "While camped near the Missouri River he [John] rescued a girl from drowning. She went to the river for a bucket of water, as she reached down to dip the water the current was so strong it pulled her in. Father [John] saw her and plunged in after her. John was an excellent swimmer but they both had a very narrow escape.

"Many hardships were endured during the journey. The weather was getting colder and they suffered for want of water. I have heard him tell how they would have to drink water that had stood in little puddles after a storm and in the tracks made by the oxen. This was while traveling through the Sweetwater and Bitter Creek country and at its best there the water was almost unfit for human use." (1)

"At Bitter Creek Father encountered his first snow storm. At night when they camped, the wagon boss told the drivers to pick up their ox yokes and other articles as they were going to have a snow storm. John was 20 years old but did not have an idea what snow was. He didn't take any notice of the instructions and left his articles on the ground, but he said the next morning when he had to hunt ox yokes, whips, etc. out of a foot of snow [and he was in his bare feet] he

resolved from then on to obey orders. At any rate it was a useful lesson.” (1)
This has been a useful lesson on obedience passed down to his family through the generations.

The following article is taken from Church Chronology. “(Fri. September 22, 1865) Captain Minor G. Atwood’s Company of emigrating saints was attacked by Indians west of Fort Laramie. Several of the brethren were wounded and one woman, (Mrs. Grundtvig) carried away by the savages.” My father saw the Indians capture this woman. (1)

The company arrived in Salt Lake 9 November 1865 and spent a very cold winter particularly because “they were unable to buy warm clothes in Africa and were not prepared for the change of climate.” The Smith family had brought bolts of silk and lots of tea and spices. At that time tea was \$1.00 a pound which Martha traded for food they needed – one pound of tea traded for ¼ cup of milk. The family who had once known luxury, servants and warmth were now reduced to poverty but never regretted the decision they made to join the church.

The winter of 1865-66 was very severe in Utah and they didn’t have enough feed for their cattle. They were advised to turn them loose on West Jordan for the winter. Because of the extreme cold, the animals froze or starved to death.

John worked with his uncle and cousins on a canal being built in eastern Salt Lake in early 1866. They received their pay from the old Tithing Office, which was a little food. (7)

When the Black Hawk war broke out in June 1866 he went “with the first company of militia to San Pete County in Colonel Wm. Casper’s company. On Sunday, June 24th, the Indians made a raid on Thistle Valley, San Pete County killing Charles Brown, wounded Thomas Snarr, and drove off 28 head of horses. Father helped care for the two men. He was in the Black Hawk war about four months then returned to Salt Lake Valley.” (1)

John met Sarah Ellen Neibaur and they were married 16 November 1867 in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City in a ceremony performed by Brigham Young, Jr. (15) Sarah Ellen was the daughter of Alexander and Ellen Breakell Neibaur and was born in Salt Lake City, May 21, 1849. {Her father was the first Jew to join the LDS church and he served as teacher of Hebrew and German to the Prophet Joseph Smith.} John learned the plasterer trade and helped build many buildings in Salt Lake and Summit County. He worked on the railroad in 1868-69 and was present when the golden spike was driven 10 May 1869 at Promontory, Utah. He helped with the building of the Salt Lake Temple by hauling materials.

In 1869 their first child was born and his wife was very ill for the next nine weeks. In May of 1869 Sarah's "sister Bertha's husband was killed... in Kamas, kicked by his horse... As there was no work of any kind, times being hard and nothing to do, we arranged to come here (to Kamas) and take her piece of ground. It was just squatter's rights. She had an old wagon, a pair of small ponies, one cow and one acre of wheat. On June 16, 1869 we arrived in Rhodes Valley, now called Kamas. ...We lived in one little room on the south side of the fort. As soon as we got settled John started with a few poles which he hauled over Jordan, taking four days to make the trip for which he got flour, a little bacon and some Dixie molasses. ...When the wheat was cut and hauled I was to do the stacking as John threw it off the wagon. When I had the stack up eight feet it slipped out and down and I came in a heap to the ground. Brother Harder saw our plight and came and stacked the wheat. We had a good laugh and felt as happy as if we had good sense." In the fort where they lived in 1869 were twenty-seven families. (15)

John built the first wire fence in the Valley and also helped take out the first irrigation canal from the Provo River. Through the winter of 1870 John cut and hauled logs. Then when his wife's mother died they returned to Salt Lake for three years living there in the summer where John got a job for \$100 [\$60] a month working at his trade. They would return "to Kamas in the winter where there was no rent to pay or wood to buy. Through those three years of saving and strict economy we saved enough to pay for a secondhand wagon, a pair of three year old steers and two cows with enough hay to feed them through the winter." (15)

He moved his family to a homestead on the Provo River in April 1874. There was plenty of wild game and fish here, and a natural spring flowed through their small spring house where they kept their food cool. John did a lot of freighting with ox teams back and forth to Salt Lake. There were many adventures, accidents and incidents while they lived here. One time late in the summer while John was milking he "heard the cry 'Help, Help!'. John hurried to the place where he found two men and two mules, struggling in a swamp. He got them home where they stayed for two days. The older one was an English Lord in poor health out from England to trail through the hills of Utah." (15)

His trade of plastering took him to many different areas. He plastered many of the houses in Summit County. Other buildings he did included the Summit Stake House in Coalville, the Opera House in Park City, and the Kamas Hall.

In 1910 John and his wife moved to Kamas to own and successfully operate the Kamas Hotel until their health would no longer permit it.

John and Sarah Ellen Neibaur O'Driscoll had a large family of twelve children –eight boys and four girls. One of the girls, Susie, is my grandmother. (Susie O'Driscoll married to Joseph Edward Wilde.)

	Born	Place
Rachel	3 Jan 1869	Salt Lake City, Utah
Ellen	6 Apr 1870	Kamas, Summit, Utah
George Alexander	25 July 1871	Salt Lake City, Utah
John Hyrum	27 March 1873	Kamas, Summit, Utah
Richard Breakell	16 Oct 1874	Kamas, Summit, Utah
William Henry	9 Dec 1875	Kamas, Summit, Utah
Leslie	5 Nov 1877	Kamas, Summit, Utah
Susie	13 May 1880	Kamas, Summit, Utah
Nathan Neibaur	23 March 1882	Kamas, Summit, Utah
Isaac Breakell	27 Nov 1884	Kamas, Summit, Utah
Gladys	26 Feb 1888	Kamas, Summit, Utah
Jesse Paul	30 July 1890	Kamas, Summit, Utah

John Knight O'Driscoll went by the last name of Smith[†] until most all of his children were born. Later, family members remaining in South Africa wrote to his family asking that they change their name back to O'Driscoll since no other family members had come to America and they wanted the name to be in America. This was done when Susie was about 9 years old and she had gone by the name of Susie Smith until that time. (17) "None of father's [John's] family ever came to this country and he never had a chance to return to see his mother much as he wished to." (1)

When John O'Driscoll suffered a heart attack and died his wife Sarah Ellen said "...on the twentieth day of October 1923 at the age of seventy-eight years, dear John quietly went to sleep without a pain or struggle" (15) at Kamas, Utah. He is buried in the old Francis/Kamas, Utah cemetery with a monument denoting his service in the Black Hawk War.



Resources for Information

1. **Story of John O'Driscoll** written by his daughter, Susie O'Driscoll Wilde (Mrs. Joseph Edward Wilde). Grandma Susie submitted this story to the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers where it is documented. There are several other persons who have submitted this same story written by Susie as their contribution to the Daughters of the Pioneers so that the file contains a lot of duplicated stories. My name is LuJeane Wilde Maxwell and Susie is my paternal grandmother.
2. **O'Driscoll surname information** from Classic Designs Ltd, published by L. J. Young, Unit 6, The Blarney, County Cork, Ireland.
3. **Copy of the actual handwritten Christening Seal** (called the DoopSeel) for John Knight O'Driscoll.
4. Typed **translation of Christening Seal** for John Knight O'Driscoll.
5. Copy of the **Death Notice for John Knight** (Grandfather of John O'Driscoll) which lists his children including John's mother Rachel who married James Driskill, and his aunt Martha who married Henry Smith.
6. **Four letters (copies) sent to John and Sarah Ellen O'Driscoll by their relatives still in South Africa** giving names and information that have not been fully put in the proper relationships. The originals of these letters have been "placed in Archival Protectors along with a transcription, and

copies of both the originals and transcriptions were made for other family members.” By Karen Wilde Squires, Salt Lake City, Utah.

“Original spelling, grammar and composition were kept to give the reader a sense of the writer and the time of the writing. Very little could not be read but the surname of Aunt Jane seems to be the most difficult to discern... Any clarification is noted usually in parentheses and an occasional unreadable word is indicated with dashes... On the fourth letter... some of the margin notes she made were not transcribed due to their legibility and the difficulty of placing them on the new transcribed page.” a- Letter #1 from Annie Bathgate (sister to John O’Driscoll) dated May 17th, 1898.

b- Letter #2 from Aunt Jane P (Relationship not fully determined at this writing – Dec 2002) from “Keur Bush” dated “March the 6 1910”

c- Letter #3 from Aunt Jane Pauls in Keur Bush dated “April the 2 1911” d- Letter #4 from Jane Purls in Keur Bush dated “January the 4 1912”

7. History of Martha Knight Smith by Lois Noon Huff in 1987. Martha was a sister to Rachel Knight O’Driscoll and an aunt to John O’Driscoll. Many references concerning the life and/or experiences of John are found in this record.

8. Histories of Henry Smith and Martha Knight by Myrtle L. Wilcken in 1961 from information obtained from Clyde Smith of Provo, Utah. Clyde Smith was the son of the youngest son (Joseph) of Henry and Martha Knight Smith. Henry and Martha are uncle and aunt to John Knight O’Driscoll. References concerning to life and/or experiences of John are found in this record.

9. Stephen Smith & Ann Waler or Warner compiled by Lois Noon Huff in 1979 from information gathered by a third cousin, Margaret Pelton. Stephen and Ann are the parents of Henry Smith mentioned above. The history gives information about “how the Smiths came to be in South Africa.”

10. Biography of Annie Jane Smith by Edda Noon for the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, compiled from excerpts in family records and letters. Annie Jane is a daughter of Henry and Martha Smith mentioned above. References are made to life and experiences of John and the Smith family.

11. Story related by word of mouth to LuJeane Wilde Maxwell by her Aunt Ellen Wilde Carpenter in about 1985. At the present time (Dec 2002)

Ellen Carpenter is still living and is 94 years old. Ellen is the daughter of Susie Wilde O'Driscoll (referred to above) and worked with her mother quite extensively at one time on O'Driscoll information.

- 12. Family Group Record of James and Rachel Knight O'Driscoll** from the Family Search Ancestral File. There are a few inconsistencies in this information needing further research.
- 13. European Settlement in South Africa**, from South African genealogy procured from the Internet Sept 2002
- 14. Kaffir Folk Tales, Introductory Chapter Regarding the Kaffirs**, from Internet Sept 2002
- 15. History of Sarah Ellen Neibaur O'Driscoll** written by herself. She is the wife of John Knight O'Driscoll.
- 16. Letter written by Sarah Ellen Neibaur O'Driscoll, 1935** referred to in the history of Martha Knight Smith (above) concerning the massacre in South Africa. Letter not yet found but search is in progress (November 2002)
- 17. Personal information** given by word of mouth to LuJeane Wilde Maxwell by Susie O'Driscoll Wilde in the 1960's
- 18. Pictures** in possession of LuJeane W. Maxwell, New Harmony, Utah

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Footnote: This story transcribed by Vicki Lee O'DRISCOLL HULL in 2008, from Daughters of Utah Pioneers History. Not to be reproduced for monetary gain.

† There is no proof he went by the name of SMITH. On the passenger list "Mexicano" he is listed as John Odrisial {O'Driscoll}. It is not mentioned in the history written by Sarah Ellen Neibaur O'Driscoll, and also not listed on his death certificate. {Full name stated as John O'Driscoll: written by his wife}