

THE STORY OF THE SHAWCROFT FAMILY

“And blessed are they who shall seek to bring
forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have
the gift of the Holy Ghost;
and if they endure unto the end they
shall be lifted up at the last day,
and shall be saved in the everlasting
Kingdom of the Lamb.”
1 Nephi 13: 37

Just as there was a time when no Anglo-Saxon foot had touched the shores of America, so there was a period when the ancestors of the English lived far away from the British Isles, and were rightly looked upon as foreigners there. The Romans were the first to over-run Britain, but they withdrew at the coming of the Teutonic invaders, tribes of Jutes, Angles, and Saxons, who dwelt in Denmark and along the North Sea. The Angles, one of the important Teutonic tribes, furnished the name for their new home, which was called Angle-land, afterward shortened to England. Later, England was invaded by the Normans, or North men, another people who originally came from northern Europe. Since climate determines the vigor and characteristics of a race, the feeble could not withstand the rigorous northern climates, so only the strongest in each generation survived, and these transmitted their strength and vigor to their children. These stalwart and sturdy “north people” were the forbears of the Shawcroft family of Derbyshire, England.

A croft in England is a small enclosed field tilled by tenant farmers. During the days of the Feudal System, there were many of these small crofts, owned by the Feudal Lords, but farmed by the people who paid homage to them. This family chanced to lived on a croft near a small wood, since Bardsley’s Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames lists Shaw as meaning “at a shaw” or a residence beside a small wood. When the people of England began to use surnames at about 1000 A.D., this family took its surname from its place of residence and the surname became Shawcroft. From this name we know that the Shawcrofts were people who tilled the land. Later, with the

decline of Feudalism and the discovery of coal in the late 1500's, England fast became an industrial land, with coal mines and factories replacing the farms and flocks. It was in the heart of this industrial and mining area of Derbyshire, that we find the first definite records of the family.

Derbyshire, located in the north central part of England, is a county of rolling hills and beautiful valleys. Derby, the county seat and largest town, is located on rolling hills and the following pictures show the type of hills and valleys that comprise the entire county. Others towns are Alfreton, Ripley, Riddings, Horsley, Swanwick, Belper, Duffield, Pentrich, Birchwood, Greenhill Lane, Ironville, Summercotes and Denby. Shawcroft names are found in the early parish records of all of these places, and since the towns and villages are very close to each other, it would indicate that all of these people were more or less related. Throughout Derbyshire there are extensive collieries, iron furnaces, framework knitting factories, pottieries, silk mills and other factories.



William Shawcroft, our ancestor, was born at Greenhill, Hillocks, which was a place in the town of Ripley. He was born to John Shawcroft and Sarah England. John was a coal miner. His son, William, also worked in the mines. William married Ann Hunt on September 6, 1847 at the parish church of Duffield near Denby.

Ann Hunt was the daughter of John Hunt and Sarah Bardell Hunt, whose families had resided in and near Denby for several centuries. Sarah Hunt was a Methodist and a very religious woman. Her husband, John, was not interested in religion. Ann Hunt had a brother, also named John, who relates the following. "I resided at Claycross, living very comfortable. A young man who was living with me got killed in the pit which led me to think very earnestly about my soul's salvation, but I knew not where to go to be right. I always had a desire to be religious, but never could fix on one society. They differed so much from the scriptures which I always believed to mean what they said. My wife love the Ranters(a form of Quakers) best and I loved the Methodists. I had not heard there was any Latter-Day Saints. But about this time, one Joshua Cutts with his wife came to live neighbors with us. We knew his wife well, but did not know they were Saints until she came into our house when we were getting ready for chapel and I asked her where she was going. She said she was going to a house of the Saints. That week I had heard of them so I said I would go with her that night. Mack Fletcher from Chesterfield preached....I liked his preaching very well and he brought forward a deal of scripture which was what I believed. Wednesday night we went again where Elder Ward preached. I was much delighted for I thought I had found the peoples of God, and I got some books and was well pleased with them. I attended the meetings three other times when I along with my wife went forth and was baptized for the remission of our sins by Thomas Pointon, on the 23rd of November 1848, after which we rejoiced greatly, and I began to bear my testimony to all I came near and we went to Denby to see our parents and friends who had not yet heard the gospel. My father's name was John and my mother is Sarah Hunt. She was a Methodist and my father never was religious. My mother soon obeyed the gospel, but he has not yet."

The testimony of young John Hunt fell in a fruitful field, as the records of the Belper Branch of the Derbyshire Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints show that Sarah Hunt, age 44, was baptized on February 6, 1849, residence Smithyhouse, Denby, by Elder Wm. Brewerton. She was confirmed the same day by Elders Brewerton and Ball. Her daughter, Ann H. Shawcroft, age 23, was baptized Dec. 25, 1850 by Eli Joseph Hall, who also confirmed her. Her residence was given as Smithhouse, Denby. This mother and daughter remained faithful members throughout their lives. The Elders visited their home often and were always kindly received. Sarah Hunt was known to have walked eight milies to attend the church meetings. This was probably to and from Belper, which was four miles from Denby, where the church meetings were held.

In 1857, a tragedy befell the Shawcroft family, for William Shawcroft was hurt in an accident in the coal mine. He suffered a severe back injury and remained a cripple from that time on. Young, John, then barely nine years old, went to work in the coal mines to help out the family. By this time Ann had given birth to five children, four of whom were living. Consequently, John was never able to go to school and never learned to read or write. He worked long hours in the pit, going down into the mine before the sun came up and leaving the mine after sunset. He seldom saw the sun. It was hard work and the pay was poor, especially for a child when there were no labor laws to protect him.

