



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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Sometimes as I search our historic community for stories to pass on to my readers, I find a history of one of the early residents who was truly a remarkable person. I found another of those recently and hope you enjoy it.

John Kelly built the home near the intersection of Second North and Main Street on the east side of Main. It is believed that the lower floor, which is a walk-in basement built of stone with the door on the east, was built about 1852. The upper two brick floors were added about 1872. Until quite recently, the home has been occupied by descendants of its original owner. Many people refer to it as the Alma Iverson home. Alma was a great-grandson of John Kelly.

John Kelly was born in Kilmarnock, Scotland in 1824. It was obvious from an early age that he was an intelligent young man and spent a large amount of time studying and reading constantly. This became a great advantage to him as he set out at an early age to make his mark on life.

His first job was with a lawyer who recognized John's potential and recommended he begin work at Kilmarnock School, working with the students. He began regular teaching in grammar schools at the age of fourteen. When he was seventeen, he began teaching in Scotch Preparatory School for College. Also at the age of seventeen, he fluently spoke four languages: Danish, Italian, Hebrew and English. He was an excellent mathematician.

When he was nineteen, his mother died and a year later his father. His two brothers were married and had families of their own, so he supported his sister Mary. In 1846, John was baptized into the LDS Church and served a mission in Scotland. In January 1849, John's sister married and two months later John married Mary Carmichael.



Older picture of John Kelly's home

John continued his teaching career and missionary work and on March 17, 1854 their son John Carmichael Kelly was born in Worcester, England.

At the time there were many English and Scotch people who were emigrating to America to join the Saints there. John and Mary decided to take their young son and join them. They sailed from Liverpool on May 3, 1856 on the *Thornton*, which was under the leadership of James G. Willie. They remained in his company until they reached Salt Lake City on November 9, 1856.

The trip across the plains was full of disasters and when the company reached the Green River Ferry, nearly all of the company came down with what they called "Mountain Fever". John was terribly sick, but Mary cared for him constantly.

In April 1857, John was called by Brigham Young to go to Fillmore to teach school and improve the cultural life of the community.

In 1859 their son James was born, and in 1861 William, followed by Mary in 1868. John had been teaching in the little log school house, leading the choir for the church, organizing dramatic societies and debating societies. John also composed many hymns, including one that is frequently sung today, "Zion stands with Hills Surrounded."

An epidemic of diphtheria in 1863 caused many deaths among the children of Fillmore. William, James and Mary all died of the disease, leaving John C. as an only child. Soon after this Mary developed cancer. Because she didn't know how long she would live, Mary began looking for a second wife for John. She chose Margaret Melville, daughter of Alexander. Mary lived until her son John was married and had a son William before she died in 1873.

John married Margaret Melville in 1863 and they had nine children: Mary, Quintin, Alexander, Ada, Wallace Eugene, Viola, Eva, Irene and Lincoln.

John founded the first dramatic society of Millard County. He wrote essays and poetry and letters for the Deseret News. He also studied, adding Greek, Latin, German and French to his vocabulary. He had a small store on Main Street and was postmaster for a number of years. He was one of the early school teachers of Fillmore. John entered politics and became county treasurer for several terms, county recorder, superintendent of schools, mayor and member of the city council.

He passed away at the age of eighty on August 8, 1904.



Present day view of John Kelly's home