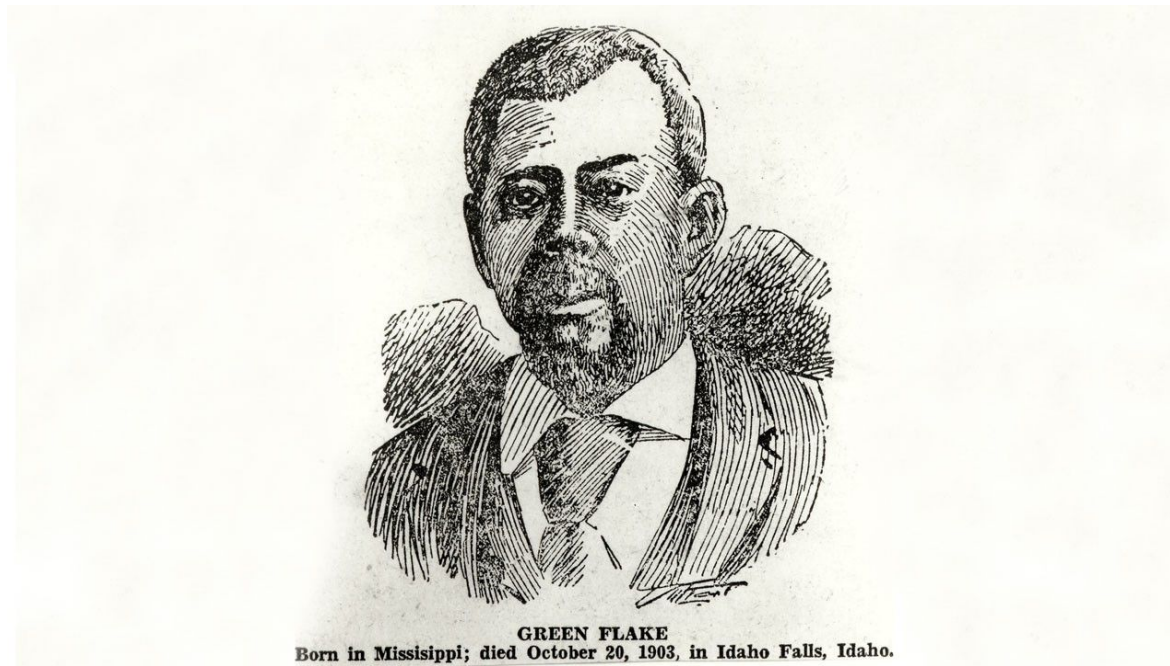


# “In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions”

Jonathan A. Stapley and Amy Thiriot

## Green Flake’s Legacy of Faith



On April 7, 1844, Joseph Smith arose at his final General Conference and delivered what many believe to be his greatest sermon. His topic, the relationship of man and God, transformed the understanding of members of the restored church. That same day, John Brown, a missionary in Mississippi, noted in his diary that “we ordained two elders the same day, brother James M. Flake & Washing[ton] N. Cook. I also baptized two black men, Allen & Green, belonging to Brother Flake.”<sup>1</sup>



Green was born into slavery on the Jordan Flake plantation near Wadesboro, Anson County, North Carolina, in the mid-1820s.<sup>2</sup> Later,

Jordan’s son, James Madison Flake, took Green to Mississippi to help colonize the land being vacated by the forced relocation of the Five Civilized Tribes. It was in Mississippi that James, his wife, Agnes Love Flake, and their slaves met Elder Benjamin Clapp and joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Flake household traveled first to Nauvoo, Illinois, then on to Winter Quarters. When the first company of Saints left for the Rocky Mountains, three convert families from Mississippi sent their slaves ahead with the vanguard pioneer company. The slaves, Green Flake, Oscar Crosby, and Hark Lay (later Wales), were to prepare homes for the families at their destination.

Although references company members made to the black men traveling with them were not particularly enlightened, the men were a vital part of the pioneer trek.<sup>3</sup> When Brigham Young lay ill at the head of Emigration Canyon, he sent Green and others ahead to prepare the road. Green drove the first wagon into Emigration Canyon,<sup>4</sup> and when Young arrived in the valley, Green had already planted crops. When James and Agnes Flake arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in October 1848, they found that Green had built them a comfortable log cabin in the South Cottonwood area of the Salt Lake Valley.

James soon passed away, and three years later the widowed Agnes and her three young boys went to settle San Bernardino, California. Agnes took her slave, Liz, with her, but left Green in the Salt Lake Valley. Several years later, as Agnes was dying, she had Amasa Lyman write to

Brigham Young to ask him to sell Green Flake to raise funds for her family. No sale took place; Green may have considered himself freed when James Madison Flake died in 1850.

Green Flake married Martha Crosby, the daughter of Vilate Crosby and half-sister of Hark (Lay) Wales and Oscar Crosby. While still a slave, Martha had been baptized along with members of the Crosby family in Mississippi about the same time Green was baptized. Green and Martha had two children, Lucinda and Abraham. Green remained in an area of the Salt Lake Valley known as Union for most of the rest of his life. He farmed his land and was involved in mining ventures with Martha's family members, Hark Wales and Miles Litchford. Green was an active member of the Union Ward.





*Utah Semi-Centennial Pioneer Jubilee pin presented to Green Flake in 1897.*

As the years wore on, Green became a popular speaker at Pioneer Day celebrations. During the 1894 celebrations, “Green Flake ... made an interesting address, stating that he was proud to be of that honorable and honored body [of 1847 Pioneers].”<sup>5</sup> In 1896, Green moved to Gray’s Lake, Idaho, to be near his children and grandchildren, but returned to Salt Lake City in 1897 for the Jubilee Pioneer Day celebration. A newspaper account described the surviving pioneers and proclaimed that “one of the most interesting of these old-timers was Green Flake, the only colored survivor of the band of ’47. Green is a vigorous, broad-shouldered, good-natured, bright old gentleman, long a resident of Salt Lake County, but now living at John Gray’s Lake, Idaho. He wears glasses, but that is the only sign of old age about him. His voice might do for a trumpet, and he steps off like a West Pointer when he walks.”<sup>6</sup>

Green passed away in 1903.<sup>7</sup> The Deseret Evening News said at the time of his death that “Bro. Flake had reached the honorable age of 76, which means, to all who knew him, 76 years of honest, hard work for the betterment of humanity, and for an exaltation in his Father’s kingdom.”<sup>8</sup>

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## *The Deseret Evening News*

Sixty years earlier, when Green joined the church, a black seventy named Elijah Abel had just returned from a mission, and members of the Quorum of the Twelve were promoting Joseph Smith's proposal to free all the slaves in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Not long after Green arrived in the Great Basin, however, church leaders began to exclude black men from the priesthood, a change that also limited black members' access to the temple.

Despite this change, Green lived out his life in full faith.<sup>10</sup> He carved a gravestone for his wife that he ultimately shared with her in the Union Cemetery. Above his name is etched in now weather-worn and barely legible text: "In my Father's house are many mansions." This invocation echoed the sentiments Joseph Smith preached the day Green was baptized: "There [are] many mansions in my father's Kingdom. What have we to console us in relation to our dead? We have the greatest hope in relation to our dead of any people on earth. We have seen them walk worthy on earth and those who have died in the faith are now ... gone to await the resurrection of the dead, to go to the celestial glory."<sup>11</sup>

Sources



1. John Brown, *Reminiscences and Journals*, April 3-7, 1844, p. 27, microfilm of holograph, MS 1636, LDS Church History Library.
2. Census records placed Green Flake’s birth between 1825 and 1828. His gravestone states 1828. Newspaper articles at the time of his death noted that he was 76 years old, which would indicate a date of 1826 or 1827. Near the end of his life Green noted that he was “Born in north Car[o]lina, ” at “mads burr” [probably Wadesboro], Anson County, North Carolina. Green Flake, *Reminiscences*, in *Utah Semi-Centennial Commission, The Book of the Pioneers* [ca. 1897], quoted in *Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel, 1847–1868*.
3. “Fifty Years Ago Today,” *Salt Lake Tribune* , May 31, 1897, 1.
4. “More Pioneers,” *Deseret News* , July 19, 1897, 2.
5. “The Veterans’ Reunion,” *Salt Lake Herald*, August 21, 1894, 8.
6. “The Opening Day of the Jubilee,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 20, 1897, 1.
7. “Died,” *Salt Lake Herald* , October 23, 1903, 8.
8. “Union. Funeral of Green Flake. Aged Colored Pioneer Laid to Rest Honored and Respected by All,” *Deseret Evening News* , October 31, 1903, 9.
9. Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *Journals, Volume 2: 1842-1843 in The Joseph Smith Papers* , ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011), 197 and 212; *General Smith's Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States* (Nauvoo Ill.: John Taylor, 1844), 7.
10. “Union. Funeral of Green Flake. Aged Colored Pioneer Laid to Rest Honored and Respected by All,” *Deseret Evening News* , October 31, 1903, 9.
11. Joseph Smith, Sermon, April 7, 1844, Wilford Woodruff report, Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon Cook, eds., *Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah:

BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 347; cf., Thomas Bullock report, *ibid.*, 354.

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