

**Chief Pioneer of Lewiston, Utah**  
**Peter Edmund Van Orden**  
**And His Second Family**  
**First Son of William and Julia Ann Van Orden**

By Bruce A. Van Orden  
Great-Grandson  
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This year we celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup>-anniversary of the birth of William Van Orden. William and his wife, Julia Ann Haight, who was born a year later in 1805, were married in Greene County, New York on 12 March 1827. Their firstborn, Charlotte, was born in 1828, also in the Catskill Mountain country of Greene County. Shortly after her birth, the young family made their way southwest to the Finger Lakes Region and settled on a large farm two miles east of Owasco Lake in Sempronius Township, four miles north of the village of Moravia. Later that portion of the county was changed to Moravia Township.

Our Peter was born at their farm in Sempronius on 27 January 1830. Peter often related to his children his pleasure in being born the same year as the restored Church came into being.

Peter's siblings are Charlotte (13 January 1828 to 10 September 1895), Mary Ann Helen (27 December 1831 to 25 October 1925), Everett Clark (2 January 1834 to 18 November 1911), Eliza Dorleska (2 November 1835 to 29 February 1836), Sarah Louisa (25 September 1836 to 20 May 1883), Marie Antoinette (3 April 1839 to 21 April 1916), and William Arthur (18 May 1841 to 19 August 1844).

Alan Van Orden, a great-grandson of Peter Edmund Van Orden through his first wife, Martha Ann Knight, has also written a biographical paper on Peter. His emphasis is on Peter's youth, his early career as a teamster between the Missouri River and the Great Basin, and Peter's first

family. Peter returned from mining after three years in Montana in the 1860s to find that Martha Ann Knight had divorced him (with permission from Brigham Young). Peter had gathered \$8,000 worth of gold. Alan's history of Peter Edmund Van Orden Sr. is found on this same CD.

My paper will focus on Peter's life as he regrouped, married again, homesteaded in Lewiston, Utah, and raised a second family.

I wish to emphasize some of the key points of Peter's youth that he passed on to his second family. Peter had a powerful testimony of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. He did not remain bitter about his earlier divorce. He maintained close contact with his children from his first marriage and visited them from time to time. Peter testified frequently to the miracle of August 8, 1844, wherein Brigham Young, speaking in behalf of the entire Twelve Apostles, was transfigured before the people in Nauvoo into the image and voice of Joseph Smith. This was evidence that the Lord's mantle had fallen upon Brigham Young after Joseph Smith's martyrdom. Peter witnessed this miracle with his own eyes and ears. Peter also told his second family of assisting the survivors of the Martin and Willey handcart companies of 1856 in making their way into the Salt Lake Valley.

Peter took two of his children into his home to raise when he returned to Kaysville, Utah, sometime in the late 1860s. The two were Mary Elizabeth and Peter Edmund Jr. Their mother, Martha Ann, who had married Martin Mills in 1867, settled in St. George.

Peter found his new spouse, Sarah Ellen McFerson, in Kaysville, where she also resided. Sarah was born to Dimon Runnels McFerson and Mary Ann Neas in Kaneshville, Pottowattomie County, Iowa, on 20 October 1846. Both of Sarah's parents were staunch Latter-day Saints who accepted the gospel early in the restoration.<sup>1</sup>

Dimon was born 15 June 1809 in Newport, Cheshire County, New Hampshire. His family moved to Freedom, Cattaraugus County, New York, where they accepted the gospel at the hands of Elder Orson Pratt in 1834. The family gathered to Caldwell County, Missouri, and witnessed the siege of Far West in October and November 1838. Dimon married Amilla Savage on 17 February 1839 in Caldwell County. The couple had two children, one of which died in childbirth. Amilla died in 1841 giving birth to a daughter, who was named Amilla after her mother. Dimon and his little Amilla gathered with the Saints in Nauvoo. Dimon remained a single father in Nauvoo during the lifetime of Joseph Smith and for a year and half afterwards. He was a close friend to the Prophet and Hyrum Smith, and he helped build the Nauvoo Temple. Dimon married Mary Ann Neas, fifteen years his junior, on 29 November 1845.

Mary Ann Neas was born 29 January 1824 in rural Butler, Butler County, Pennsylvania. Elders of the Church visited her family in Leechburg, Pennsylvania, in 1840. The entire family joined the Church. Mary Ann was baptized by Elder William Smith, brother to the Prophet Joseph. The family gathered to Nauvoo in 1844 just a month prior to the Joseph Smith's martyrdom. The family settled in southern Hancock County, where they were targeted by marauding Anti-Mormons in 1845. Both of Mary Ann's parents died during this stressful period.

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<sup>1</sup> Information on Dimon Runnels McFerson and Mary Ann Neas comes from the well-researched paper "History of Mary Ann Neas McFerson," written by Albert B. and Joan Clark, 1995.

Dimon and Mary Ann McFerson were charged to stay in Nauvoo to help complete the temple and ready it for total dedication, which took place on 30 April 1846. Dimon was a cooper by trade, and his expertise was needed. They arrived in Council Bluffs in July 1846. Dimon purchased wooded land from the Pottowattamie Indians. In a primitive cabin, Mary Ann gave birth to their first child Sarah Ellen on 20 October 1846. Sarah Ellen is our ancestress. The McFersons had twelve total children, two of which died in infancy.

Here is a photograph of Mary Ann Neas McFerson in her elderly years:



Under the direction of presiding Apostle, Elder Orson Hyde, Dimon assisted in building up Kaneshville, Iowa, as a temporary way station and gathering spot for the Saints coming from the East. When Brigham Young in 1851 directed Elder Hyde to prepare all Saints in Kaneshville to gather to the Great Basin, Dimon and Mary Ann prepared their family for the exodus. They traveled in the Orson Hyde Company, leaving in May 1851. This company suffered far worse than average of all companies that went to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake from 1847 to 1869. They were attacked by Indians and robbed. They lost cattle to stampedes caused by buffalo. By late summer all their food supplies were exhausted. They were providentially blessed with flour from Elder Ezra T. Benson whom they met as he was heading east. Twice more they were on the brink of starvation only to be rescued by outgoing Saints who brought food and solace to them.

After arriving in Salt Lake City on 6 October 1851, the McFersons left two days later with their new friend and rescuer, Henry Wooley, to his residence in Kaysville. They stayed with the Wooleys all winter. In 1852 Dimon began created a family homestead on North Holmes Creek in Kaysville. Over time the family grew and eventually started to prosper. Both Dimon and Mary Ann served the Lord and His Church in key positions. Mary Ann was the first primary president in Kaysville. Dimon served several terms as Justice of the Peace and also later on the Kaysville City Council. Dimon was Justice of the Peace when Peter Edmund Van Orden courted and married Dimon's oldest daughter, Sarah Ellen. Their marriage took place 10 October 1870 in the Endowment House.

As a single woman of nineteen, Sarah Ellen was endowed in the Endowment House on 10 March 1865. She has the privilege of being baptized for twelve deceased friends in the Endowment House in September 1870. Upon marrying Peter, Sarah Ellen took over the job also of being stepmother to two teenage children.

Here is a photograph of Sarah Ellen McFerson Van Orden in her elderly years:



Prior to his marriage to Sarah Ellen, Peter decided to homestead in the Cache Valley somewhere north of Logan, Utah. His partners in this venture were his brother Everett Clark Van Orden, his half brother John Milton Bernhisel II (known as Milt), and his friend Robert W. Wall. Everett did not go north on the exploratory mission in the summer of 1870, but the other three did. The

looked far and wide throughout the Cache Valley including areas around Preston and Franklin, Idaho. Finally they decided on ground that appeared to be less sandy than many other nearby lands. This was barely across the Idaho border and two miles west southwest of Franklin. According to family reports and as recorded by John M. Bernhisel III, Peter stopped the other two men as they rode on horses and said with prophetic instinct, "Here we will take up four quarter sections of land [according to the U.S. Homestead Act] to make our homes."<sup>2</sup> Their total claim was 640 acres. Peter's was the southeast section which would be approximately a mile from the Idaho border. They made their claim with the new federal land office in Utah. (See graphic "The Beginning of Lewiston" by Dell Van Orden at the end of this paper.)

Peter returned in September to build the first cabin in the area of what became Lewiston. There were still Indians who lived in that vicinity. Peter desired to have a house for his new bride and his two children, Mary and Peter. This first cabin measured only sixteen by twenty feet.<sup>3</sup> Peter returned to Kaysville and then went with her to Salt Lake City to be married on 20 October 1870. They and the two teenage children, Mary and Peter, immediately went to their new cabin. Their first winter was precarious with blowing snow and grievously cold temperatures. Their nearest neighbors were in Franklin.



The next spring Everett Van Orden, Milt Bernhisel, and Robert Wall came with their families to settle on their new homesteaded acreage. Peter gradually built up his home that lasted for over a century. Soon other homesteaders came to the area as well. William Lewis of nearby Richmond was called to preside over these new arrivals as Bishop in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Thus came the name to the community of Lewiston. Peter Edmund Van Orden goes down in the annals as the chief pioneer of Lewiston. His family takes pride in saying that he was

<sup>2</sup> John M. Bernhisel III, *History of Lewiston*, n.d., n.p., 15. See "The Beginning of Lewiston, Utah" with its map and description on this CD.

<sup>3</sup> My information from this point comes from *History of Lewiston* and various papers with unknown authors entitled "Pioneers of Lewiston, Utah," "Peter Edmund Van Orden 1830-1911," "A Life History of Peter Edmund Van Orden." I also interviewed a granddaughter, Jesse Van Orden Bouwhuis, ninety-one years old at the time, on June 24, 2004. Dell Van Orden's biography of Everett Clark Van Orden (found on this CD) also was useful.

the first white man to build a house in that part of Cache Valley and that his first son from his second wife, named William Runnels Van Orden, was the first white child born in Lewiston. Peter helped survey for canals, lay out roads, and solve political problems. The early settlers of Lewiston suffered greatly with blowing sand and snow before they could build up their community adequately. The area was also dubbed “Poverty Flats.”

A young girl in Lewiston, Mary Rawlins by name, described winter in Lewiston at this time: “The snow was always deep in the winter and we enjoyed sleigh riding with the bells jingling in the cold air. The snow would freeze hard with a crust that would hold the horses and it was fun to go riding over the top of it. Sometimes the snow would come in November and last until the last of April and into May.” Mary also said that early dances in Lewiston were held in Peter Van Orden’s home.<sup>4</sup>

In 1874 Peter took a team of horses to conduct business and gather supplies in Salt Lake City. On the way home he stayed at the home of his father-in-law Dimon McFerson in Kaysville. Upon arising in the morning and readying his team of horses, Peter fell to the ground with a stroke. He remained unconscious for twelve days. His doctor told him that he could not live more than five more years. He exhibited faith and prayer, however, and lived thirty-seven more years, when he suffered another stroke and died in 1911. But clearly, life was not the same for Peter after his first stroke.

Peter’s first daughter from his first marriage, named Mary Elizabeth (Bair), married in Lewiston and lived in Richmond. Before that, Mary was the first school teacher in Lewiston.<sup>5</sup> Peter’s son, Peter Jr., moved out the Lewiston home upon becoming an adult and went to live in St. George near his mother and others of his siblings. Later he married there and eventually moved to help settle Bingham County, Idaho. Peter Edmund Van Orden Jr. has the largest posterity of Van Orden descendants that can be identified. The Van Orden name is common in many parts of southeastern Idaho.

We don’t know how often Peter visited his children and grandchildren (from his first marriage) in St. George. But we know he was there with his family in 1877 at the time of the opening of the newly dedicated St. George Temple presided over by Elder Wilford Woodruff. Elder Woodruff mobilized Peter to be a baptism proxy for one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence after Brother Woodruff had been visited in vision by these signers. This connection with Elder Woodruff would become exceptional valuable in 1893 after President Woodruff was president of the Church and had dedicated the Salt Lake Temple.

Peter Van Orden and Sarah Ellen McFerson Van Orden became parents to seven children in Lewiston. They were William Runnels (30 October 1871), David Horton (31 December 1873), Charlotte Amelia (29 September 1878), Sarah Ann (5 September 1879), Miram (4 December 1880), Keturah (23 March 1883), and Abner McFerson (28 April 1885). I am a grandson of David Horton Van Orden.

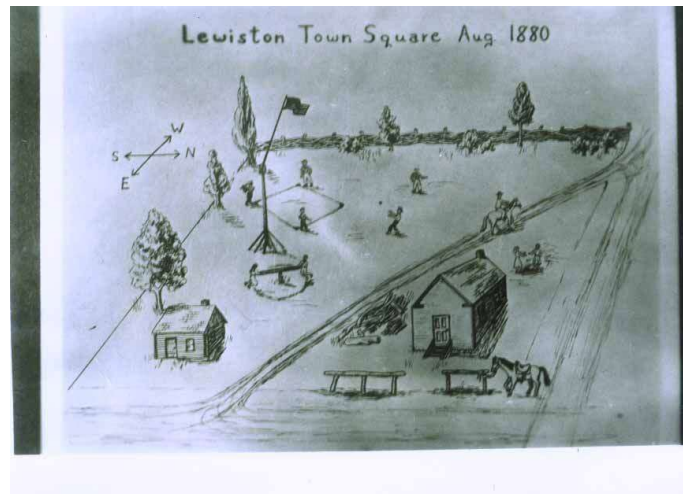
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<sup>4</sup> “Life Sketch of Mary Eveline Rawlins Leavitt (By Herself),” n.d., [http://www.rawlins.org/histories/html/rawlins\\_mary\\_eveline.html](http://www.rawlins.org/histories/html/rawlins_mary_eveline.html).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Peter's suffering health because of his stroke made him largely helpless in caring for his family as a farmer or teamster. His children, including my grandfather, were warned not to make noise to disturb their father. Peter could no longer read nor could he stand bright light and kept his rooms in the house darkened. Peter's brother Everett claimed that Peter was severely affected in his thinking prowess by the stroke.

Here is a sketch of the Lewiston Town Square in 1880:



One day in the mid-1880s Peter went with his family with a team of horses to the Logan Temple that had been dedicated in 1884. Peter was feeling so ill that he could not sit up. A bed was made for him in the wagon. His two oldest sons went along as well as his wife Sarah. He was baptized numerous times in the temple for his health. This was not an uncommon practice among the Saints. He felt much better upon his return trip. My grandfather asked him, "Pa, are you feeling any better?" Peter replied, "I'm driving this team of horses, aren't I?"

Peter was ordained a high priest by William H. Lewis in the Lewiston Ward on 16 November 1890. In April 1893, after attending a dedicatory session of the Salt Lake Temple, Peter approached President Woodruff. He explained to the prophet that his mother, Julia Ann Haight Van Orden, had not been properly sealed to his father, William Van Orden. President Woodruff agreed to take care of this and wrote to Logan Temple President Joseph Merrill that he had cancelled the sealing of Julia Ann to John M. Bernhisel and to allow Peter Van Orden to stand in as proxy for his father for the sealing of his parents and family members. Charlotte Van Orden Peck, Peter's older sister, was to act as proxy for Julia Ann. This took place on 28 September 1893.

Here is a photograph of Peter and Sarah Ellen Van Orden with two of their children in the early 1900s:



Peter passed away in his home in Lewiston on 25 September 1911 and was buried in the Lewiston City Cemetery. His wife Sarah Ellen McFerson Van Orden joined him in death less than a year later, on 20 July 1912. She was buried next to her husband.



Peter Edmund Van Orden continued faithful all his days to his Lord Jesus Christ and His restored gospel. His posterity hails him as a mighty man in Zion.





This is a classic picture of Peter E. Van Orden along with some of his living siblings. It was taken before May 1883 when Sarah Louisa passed away. In the back row left to right are John Milton Bernhisel Jr. (known as Milt and a half brother), Peter E. Van Orden, and Everett C. Van Orden. In the front row from left to right are Henrietta Harris Bernhisel (Milt's wife), Sarah Louisa Van Orden Curtis, and Charlotte Amelia Van Orden Peck.

# The Beginning of Lewiston, Utah

Peter E. Van Orden, Everett C. Van Orden,  
John M. (Milton) Bernhisel Jr., Robert W. Wall

[All except Everett, who was not with them on the trip, left Kaysville, Utah, in June 1870, to file on land in Cache Valley – which straddles the Utah-Idaho border – under the Homestead Act of 1862. Everett, one of first settlers in Franklin, Idaho, in 1860, had told them about Cache Valley].

“As they continued their course in a southeasterly direction for about eight miles [in July 1870], they emerged to a slight elevation, the soil of which appeared to be of a better grade than the low lands of which they had just passed [in the Preston/Franklin area in southern Idaho]. At this point, while the sun was still high, Peter Van Orden, who was the oldest and on whom they had looked for leadership, shouted ‘Whoa!’ The three wagons came to a stop, where all dismounted. Almost by prophetic instinct, Peter said, ‘Here we will take up four quarter sections of land to make our homes.’”

“This first quarter we will give to Milton.’ No one questioned his wisdom or authority. One hundred sixty rods were measured to the east, which marked the northeast corner of the Bernhisel homestead.”

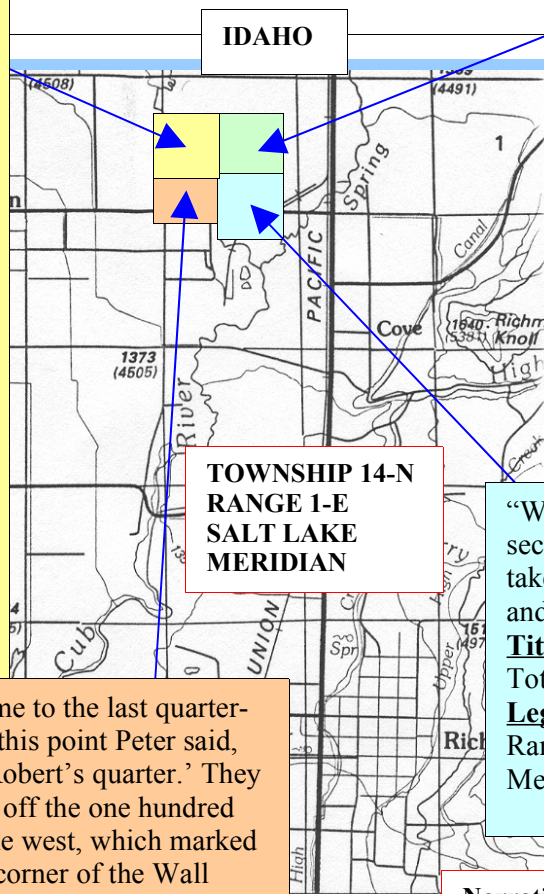
**Title issued:** April 5, 1877. Total acres: 160.16

**Legal description:** Township 14-N, Range 1-E; S ½ NE Section 5; Lot 1 or NENE Quarter, Section 5; Lot 2 or NWNE Quarter, Section 5; Salt Lake Meridian, Utah State, Cache County.

“They next came to the last quarter-section .... At this point Peter said, ‘This will be Robert’s quarter.’ They then measured off the one hundred sixty rods to the west, which marked the southwest corner of the Wall quarter-section. From this point they measured a mile to the north” ... to the starting point.

**Title issued:** April 5, 1877  
Total acres: 160 acres.

**Legal description:** Township 14-N, Range 1-E; SE Section 5, Salt Lake Meridian, Utah State, Cache County.



“Then, Peter again said, ‘This section (the one to the east of the Bernhisel section) we will give to Everett.’ In like manner they measured off Everett’s quarter-section.”

**Title issued:** April 5, 1877  
Total acres: 160.16

**Legal descriptions:** Township 14-N, Range 1-E S ½ NW Section 4; Lot 3 or NENW Quarter, Section 4; Lot 4 or NWNW Quarter, Section 4; Salt Lake Meridian, Utah State, Cache County.

“When they came to the next quarter-section to the south, Peter said, ‘I will take this section.’ It was duly measured and staked.”

**Title issued:** April 5, 1877  
Total acres: 160

**Legal description:** Township 14-N, Range 1-E; SW Section 4, Salt Lake Meridian, Utah State, Cache County.

Narratives from “History of Lewiston,” compiled by John M. Bernhisel III [n.d.] p. 15.  
Legal descriptions from Bureau of Land Management Website: [www.glorerecords.blm.gov](http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov)  
Map/ Bureau of Land Management.

Dell Van Orden 6/2004