

Emma Hale Smith (1804-1879): Family Background and First 25 Years

Emma’s Ancestors and Parents: Isaac and Elizabeth Hale

Emma Hale came from courageous ancestors. Her maternal line came to the colonies for religious hopes on the Mayflower. Emma’s paternal ancestors, voyaged to America hoping to find prosperity. We know a few details of the Isaac Hale kin:

- In 1635, Heald (later spelled Hale), arrived in the colonies as an indentured worker. He settled in Connecticut and enjoyed a modest lifestyle.
- Over a century later, Emma’s grandfather moved his family—including ten year old Isaac Hale moved from Connecticut to Wells Vermont.
- Isaac Hales was a teenager when he went to live with his grandfather Arah Ward.
- In 1777 fifty-nine-year-old grandfather Ward joined a battle against General Burgoyne and was killed at Addison, Vermont.
- In 1780, at age seventeen, Isaac enlisted as a private under the direction of Colonel Ebenezer Allen in the Revolutionary War. He returned home eight days after he enlisted to take over care of his Grandmother Phoebe Ward in her old age, to keep and provide for during her life” (Linda Newell, Valeen Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 4).
- Along with the responsibility of his grandmother, Isaac inherited his grandfather’s property in Wells, Vermont

Isaac Hale	Elizabeth Lewis Hale
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Birth: March 21, 1763, in Waterbury, Connecticut Son of Reuben Hale and Diantha Ward• Marriage: September 20, 1790, to Elizabeth Lewis• Residence: Connecticut, Vermont, New York, and Pennsylvania• Occupation: Farmer, Hunter, Innkeeper• Religious Affiliation: Methodist Episcopal Church• Military: Fought in the American Revolutionary War• Death: January 11, 1839, in Harmony, Pennsylvania	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Birth: November 19, 1767, in Litchfield County, Connecticut• Parents: Nathaniel Lewis+Esther Tuttle• Marriage: Sep 20, 1790, to Isaac Hale• Mother of nine children• Occupation: Homemaker• Religious Affiliation: Methodist and Episcopal Church• Death: February 16, 1842, Harmony, PA

- In 1784 Isaac deeded a portion of his grandmother’s land to his uncle, David Ward. We do not know if his grandmother had passed away by that time.
- Free from the responsibility of being a landowner—and perhaps also that of his grandmother—Isaac expressed his adventurous nature and left the area.
- In 1787, at age twenty-four, he explored the Susquehanna River to the Great Bend. After exploring the area and getting acquainted with the oldest settlers, Isaac went back to Vermont in 1790, at age twenty-seven and married his sweetheart, Elizabeth Lewis.
- Isaac and his brother and their respective new brides were the first white settlers in the area later known as Harmony, Pennsylvania.

Isaac Hale (1763-1839)	+	Elizabeth Lewis Hale (1767-1842)
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Jesse (1792-1874)	David (1794-1878)	Alva (1795-1862)	Phoebe (1798-1836)	Elizabeth (1800-1874)	Isaac (1802-1892)	Emma (1804-1879)	Tryal (1806-1860)	Reuben (1810-1891)
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Soon after their marriage, Isaac and Elizabeth, accompanied by extended family members, moved from Wells, Vermont approximately 220 miles southwest to an area of Pennsylvania along the Susquehanna River. Isaac purchased property on the north side of the Susquehanna. He lived within a few miles of the village of Harmony (modern Oakland). Isaac purchased 150-acres at a twenty-five cents per acre (Mark Staker, *Mormon Historical Studies*, “Isaac and Elizabeth Hales,” 17). They built their home—in which their nine children were born—and Isaac was buried. Eight of Elizabeth and Isaac’s children were named after Ward or Lewis Family members—all except Emma.

During their almost fifty-year residence in the Susquehanna region, Isaac gained a reputation as a solid citizen. At one point he was a supervisor, assessor, and collector. He was also an expert marksman. He became a well-to-do hunter, innkeeper, and farmer, having a large orchard. Isaac was also a fur trader, shipping furs downriver to Philadelphia.

The Hale Family Religious Practices

The Hales attended Daniel Buck’s church, located six miles from their property. They canoed there are back and spent much of the Sabbath there. However, they stopped attending his worship services due to unorthodox religious practices. In 1807, a large Methodist revival took place near the Hale home. It was estimated that the number of people attending the revival was twice the population of the county. True to form for a revival, enthusiasm ran high. Emma’s mother Elizabeth Hale was baptized. Emma’s uncle Nathaniel Lewis was ordained a deacon.

Over time Emmy was also drawn to Methodism. Isaac Hale stood apart from religion until he overheard Emma praying for him. Isaac then turned to religion and was numbered with those of the first religious class conducted at Lanesboro, Pennsylvania, about two miles east of his property. Before long, Methodist meetings were held in the Hales’ parlor with a traveling minister preaching in his home once a month.

Emma’s Birth, Education, Skills, and Personality

On June 10, 1804, Elizabeth Hale gave birth to her seventh child, Emma—also known as “Emmy.” She was very bright and could be considered a “tomboy.” She grew up canoeing on the river and loved to ride horses. It could rightfully be said that she:

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| • Enjoyed physical activity | • Had knowledge of herbal medicine | • Independent |
| • Enjoyed sleigh riding | • Was sent away for more education at a girl’s school after age twelve | • Managed financial accounts |
| • Musical (Sang Methodist Hymns and prepared hymnal) | • Made and sold cheese and probably butter from her cow | • Housekeeper, had furnishings |
| • Cook in her father’s inn | | • Early Disciple of Restoration |
| | | • Natural Leader (Relief Society) |

Emma Meets and Marries Joseph Smith

In the early 1820s, Josiah Stowell and Jason Tidwell came to the Susquehanna Valley looking for a silver mine in the Oquago Mountains, near Harmony, Pennsylvania. Initially, Isaac Hale had some connection with the Stowell/Tidwell search: men who came to the area in search of the silver mine boarded in Isaac's inn. Mr. Stowell traveled over a hundred miles north to hire Joseph Smith and his father to help find the silver mine. However, after a few weeks of digging, Joseph convinced his employers to stop and Mr. Stowell hired him as a farm hand instead).

Joseph and his father accepted room and board at the Hale boarding house. Joseph later wrote, it was here "I first saw my wife . . . Emma Hale" (*Times and Seasons*, 2 May 1842, 772). The happiness of meeting his future wife was tempered by the cold reception of sixty-two-year-old Isaac Hale. Isaac wrote, "I first became acquainted with Joseph Smith, Jr. in November 1825. He was at the time in the employ of a set of men who were called "money-diggers" (Emily C. Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania*, 578).

According to Joseph Knight, when Joseph Smith stopped working for Josiah Stowell, Joseph Knight hired him to cut timber at his carding mill in Colesville, New York. It was Joseph Knight who loaned Joseph a sleigh to journey eighteen miles back to Harmony to court Emmy (Emma) Hale. Joseph may have also attended school in the area (Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 52).

In January 1827, Emma traveled about twenty miles north across the Pennsylvania boarder to New York. She planned to visit her sister and probably intended to see her suitor, Joseph Smith, Jr. But what happened was unexpected. They had known each other over a year and Joseph encouraged her to elope. With a little persuasion, she agreed. Years later she confessed, "preferring him to all others," she accepted his proposal. They were married on January 18, 1827 by Judge Tarbell in Banbridge, NY (Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *The Saints' Herald* 26, no. 19 [October 1, 1879]: 101, 289; Gordon A. Madsen, *BYU Studies*, vol 30, no 2, 91ff).

Years later, Joseph recorded in his journal his sustained love for Emma, "With what unspeakable delight, and what transports of joy swelled my bosom, when I took by the hand on that night, my beloved Emma, she that was my wife, even the wife of my youth; and the choice of my heart. . . . The fatigues, and the toils, the sorrows, and sufferings, and the joys and consolations from time to time. Oh! what a comingling of thought filled my mind for the moment, Again she is here, even in the seventh trouble, undaunted, firm and unwavering, unchangeable Emma" (*Journal, Dec 1841-Dec 1842*, 164. *JosephSmithPapers.org*).

After their marriage, Joseph and Emma moved into the Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith frame house in Manchester, NY. Emma was graciously received, but the adjustment was still difficult. There, Emma wrote her father, asking if she could receive her clothing, furniture, cow, and other articles left behind. Isaac responded kindlier than might have been expected: "Her property was safe and at her disposal" (*The Susquehanna Register*, vol IX, Montrose, PA, 1May 1834, 1).

Emma is "The Right Person"

According to Joseph Knight, "The 'personage' [a reference to angel Moroni] told [Joseph Smith] he could have the record the following September 'if he brought with him the right person' [to the hill] and indicated that Joseph would know who that was." Joseph "looked into his glass and found it was Emma Hale Daughter of old Mr. Hale of Pensylvany (*sic*)" (William G. Hartley, "Close Friends as Witnesses: Joseph Smith and the Joseph Knight Families," *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, The Man*, 272). On September 21, shortly before midnight, Emma dressed in her bonnet and riding dress and

left the Smith frame home with Joseph. They took Joseph Knight's wagon and drove to the hill a short distance from the home. We have two accounts of what happened next. One claimed Emma climbed the hill with Joseph, the other that she tended the horse and wagon while Joseph climbed Cumorah and conversed with Angel Moroni. Emma was the first to know that he had received the golden plates and the Nephite interpreters and artifacts.

Joseph and Emma First Home: Harmony, Pennsylvania

Isaac extended an invitation to Joseph and Emma to make their home in Harmony. Joseph accepted his offer after he received the plates, when persecution mounted in Palmyra/Manchester. Joseph wrote to Emma's brother, Alva, asking him to come with a wagon to help them move. Alva was a great help. The three arrived in Harmony late in 1827, with the plates successfully hidden in a barrel of dried beans. Isaac was not pleased when Joseph refused to show them to his father-in-law. The newly weds moved into a smaller second home close to Isaac and Elizabeth's fine home. Isaac sold Joseph thirteen and a half excellent acres—six acres pasture, six agriculture, and one prime land (www.josephsmithpapers.org/ paper-summary/agreement-with-isaac-hale-6-april-1829; and Mark Staker).

Emma and the Early Translation of the Book of Mormon

Emma was a witness of the covered plates. In addition to seeing Joseph carry them, her son later asked her about it, and he recorded her answer:

The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen tablecloth, which I had given him to fold them in. I once felt of the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book (Emma Smith, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, Oct. 1, 1879, 290).

It appears that she was also her husband's first scribe as he translated the Book of Mormon prior to April 1828. She later told her son:

When acting as his scribe, your father would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. . . . I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, and was present during the translation of the plates, and had cognizance of things as they transpired, it is marvelous to me, 'a marvel and a wonder,' as much so as to any one else (ibid., 290).

We do not see Emma's handwriting in the surviving original manuscript pages, which may be due to the fact that only 28% of the pages survive—a portion that Oliver scribed. But she may have scribed earlier on the lost manuscript pages—known as the Book of Lehi—or on other unavailable pages. She also acted as Joseph's scribe later, as directed by God in, July 1830, now recorded in D&C 25:6.

It was during this early translation of the *Book of Lehi* that Joseph asked: "Emma, did Jerusalem have walls around it?" When she answered "Yes," Joseph replied, "Oh! I was afraid I had been deceived." Emma later added the commentary to a questioner, Mr. Briggs: "He had such limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls" (John Welch and Erick B. Carlson, ed. *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*. Salt Lake City/Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2005; 129).

Emma and Joseph's Firstborn Dies in Childbirth

Before their first wedding anniversary, Emma was expecting their first child. Toward the end of her pregnancy, from mid-April to June 14, 1828, Martin Harris lived with Emma and Joseph in Harmony Pennsylvania, acting as scribe for the Book of Mormon. The day after Martin left with over one-hundred manuscript pages of translation, Emma went into labor with their first child. The labor was difficult, and their first son died the next day (*Joseph Smith Family Bible*, ca.1831-1866). They named him after Joseph's older brother Alvin, who had died almost five years earlier.

Emma herself was close to death and Joseph nursed her for two weeks. The trauma and hardship were intensified by the Emma's parents' lack of belief in Joseph's call as a prophet and the Book of Mormon as scripture. Martin's tardy return of the manuscript also worried Emma. It was at her insistence that Joseph left her in the hands of her mother so that Joseph could travel 140 miles to Palmyra to discover what had become of the translated manuscript.

Within fourteen years (1828-1842), Emma would lose five more children to death—a total of four in or shortly after childbirth and two who died at about twelve months. It is hard to imagine the trauma and hardship that this caused to her physical, spiritual, and emotional health.

Emma and Joseph's Children

Joseph Smith Jr. + Emma Hale
(1805-1844) (1804-1879)

Alvin	Louisa	Thadius	Julia Murdock	Joseph Murdock	Joseph III	Fredrick	Alexander	Don Carlos	Son	David
Hyrum (1828-1828)	(1831-1831)	(1831-1831)	(1831-1880)	(1831-1832)	(1832-1914)	(1836-1862)	(1838-1909)	(1840-1841)	(1842-1842)	(1844 1904)

Oliver Cowdery 1835 Statement about Emma

. . . Mrs. Smith, (formerly Emma Hale) . . . has most certainly evinced a decidedly correct mind and uncommon ability of talent and judgment, in a manifest willingness to fulfill, on her part, that passage in sacred writ,—“and they twain shall be one flesh”,—by accompanying her husband, against the wishes and advise of her relatives, to a land of strangers: and however I may deprecate their actions, can say in justice, her character stands as fair for morality, piety and virtue, as any in the world (*Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” October 1835*; <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1834-1836/98#full-transcript>).

Lucy Mack Smith's 1845 Statement about Emma

Shortly after Joseph death, Emma's mother-in-law Lucy Mack Smith wrote of Emma's qualities:

Whatever her hands found to do, she did with her might, untill [*sic*] she went so far beyond her strength, that she brought upon herself a heavy fit of sickness, which lasted for weeks. And, although her strength was exhausted, still her spirits were the same; which in fact, was always the case with her under the most trying circu[m]stances: And I have never seen a woman in my life, who would endure every species of fatigue and hardship, from month to month, and from year to year, with that unflinching courage, zeal and patience, which she has always done; for I know that which she has had to endure; that she has been tossed upon the ocean of uncertainty; that She has breasted the storm of persecution, and buffeted the rage of man men and devils, until [*sic*] she has been swallowed up in a sea of trouble which have borne down almost any other woman (*Lucy Mack Smith History*, 1845, p. 190, www.josephsmithpapers.org).

Excerpts from Letters between Emma and Joseph

1. Joseph wrote to Emma on April 4, 1839: "If you want to know how much I want to see you, examine your feelings, how much you want to see me, and judge for [yourself]. I would gladly [walk] from here to you barefoot and bareheaded, and half naked to see you and think it great pleasure." (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 4 April 1839, p. [1]. Joseph Smith Papers).
2. Emma wrote to Joseph on April 25, 1837: "I cannot tell you my feelings when I found I would not see you before you left . . . yet I expect you can realize them." (Letter of Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, 25 April 1837, p. 25. Joseph Smith Papers).
3. Emma wrote to Joseph on March 7, 1839: "You may be astonished at my bad writing and incoherent manner, but you will pardon all when you reflect on how hard it would be for you to write when your hands were stiffened with hard work, and your heart convulsed with intense anxiety. But I hope there is better days to come to us yet . . . ever your's affectionately." (Letter of Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, 7 March 1839, p. 37. Joseph Smith Papers).
4. Joseph wrote to Emma on October 13, 1832: "I hope you will excuse me for writing this letter so soon after writing for I feel I want to say something to you to comfort you in your [p]eculiar triel [*sic*] and present affliction." (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 13 October 1832. www.josephsmithpapers.org).
5. Joseph wrote to Emma on March 21, 1839: "I very well know your toils and sympathize with you if God will spare my life once more to have the privilege of taking care of you I will ease your care and endeavor to comfort your heart." (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 21 March 1839, pg. [1 & 3]. Joseph Smith Papers).
6. Emma wrote to Joseph on March 7, 1839: "I shall not attempt to write my feelings altogether, for the situation in which you are, the walls, bars and bolts, rolling rivers, running streams, rising hills, sinking valleys, and spreading prairies, that separate us, and the cruel injustice that first cast you into prison and still holds you there." (Letter of Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, 7 March 1839, p. 37. Joseph Smith Papers).
7. Joseph wrote to Emma on April 4, 1839: "My Dear Emma, I think of you and the children continually. If I could tell you of my tale, I think you would say it was altogether enough for one to gratify the malice of hell that I have suffered. I want to see little Fredrick, Joseph, Julia, and Alexander, Joanna and old Major." The latter was his dog. (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 4 April 1839, p. [1]. Joseph Smith Papers).
8. Joseph wrote to Emma on November 12, 1838: "Oh my affectionate Emma, I want you to remember that I am [a] true and faithful friend, to you and the children, forever my heart is entwined around yours forever and ever. (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 12 November 1838, pg. 1-2. Joseph Smith Papers).

9. Joseph wrote to Emma on June 27, 1844: “I am very much resigned to my lot, knowing I am justified and have done the best that could be done. Give my love to the children and all my Friends.” (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 27 June 1844, pg. 1-2. Joseph Smith Papers).

Timeline of Emma Hale Smith

(July 10, 1804–April 30, 1879)

July 10, 1804	Emma Hale, daughter of Isaac Hale and Elizabeth Lewis, seventh child born in Willingborough Township (renamed Harmony in 1809), Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania.
Nov 1825	Age 21: Meets Joseph Smith.
Jan 18, 1827	Age 22: Joseph and Emma marry in South Bainbridge, Chenango County, New York, officiated by Justice of the Peace Zachariah Tarbell.
Sep 22, 1827	First to learn that Joseph has the golden plates.
1828-1829	Scribe for the Book of Mormon translation.
June 15, 1828	Age 23: Gives birth to son in Harmony; baby Alvin dies.
June 28, 1830	Age 25: Is baptized a member of the Church of Christ by Oliver Cowdery.
July 1830	Age 26: Is the subject of a revelation to Joseph (D&C 25).
Aug-Sept 1830	Conceives twins.
Jan-Feb 1831	Moves to Kirtland, Geauga County, Ohio.
April 30, 1831	Gives birth to a twins—son and daughter—in Kirtland; twins die the same day.
May 1831	Becomes the adoptive mother of twins—Joseph and Julia Murdock.
Sep 1831-Mar 1832	Resides in the John Johnson home in Hiram, Portage County, Ohio.
March 29, 1832	Age 28: Adopted Joseph Murdock dies at ten months. Pregnant with Joseph III.
Nov 6, 1832	Age 29: Gives birth to Joseph Smith III upstairs bedroom of the Gilbert and Whitney Store. Julia is eighteen months old).
Dec 9, 1834	Age 30: Joseph Smith Sr. gives Emma and Joseph their patriarchal blessings.
Sept 14, 1835	Emma fulfilled assigned “to make a selection of sacred hymns,” <i>A Collection of Sacred Hymns, for the Church of the Latter-Day Saints</i> published 1835.
June 20, 1836	Age 32: Delivers Frederick Granger Williams Smith in Kirtland (Julia 5, Joseph III 3 ½).

Jan-Mar 1838	Age 33: Journey to Far West, Missouri.
June 2, 1838	Gives birth to Alexander Hale Smith in Far West. (Julia 7, Joseph III 5 ½, Frederick 2).
Dec 1838	Age 34: With Mary Fielding Smith, Hyrum's wife, and their two babies, visits Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail.
Feb 1839	Leaves Missouri; crosses the Mississippi River to reach Quincy, Illinois.
May 10, 1839	Moves to Commerce (later Nauvoo), Hancock County, Illinois.
Oct 27, 1839	Age 35: High Council of Nauvoo votes that "Sister Emma Smith select and publish a hymnbook for the use of the church."
June 13, 1840	Age 35: Delivers Don Carlos Smith in Nauvoo (Julia 10, Joseph III 8 ½, Frederick 4, Alex 2).
Aug 15, 1841	Age 37: Don Carlos Smith dies, age two.
1841	Compiles another hymnal consisting of 304 hymns.
Feb 6, 1842	Age 38: Gives birth to 8 th child, an unnamed son who dies, in Nauvoo.
March 17, 1842	Elected President of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo.
Sep 1843	Joseph administered To Emma: temple initiatory washings, anointings, endowment, in their mansion house, and on Sept 28 sealing
June 27, 1844	Age 39: Mob kills Joseph and his brother Hyrum Smith in Carthage, Illinois.
Nov 17, 1844	Age 40: Gives birth to David Hyrum Smith in Nauvoo (Julia 13 ½, Joseph III 12, Fredrick 8, Alexander 6 ½).
Dec 23, 1847	Age 43: Marries Lewis Crum Bidamon at Nauvoo on Joseph Smith's Birthday.
April 6, 1860	Age 56: Begins her affiliation with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.
April 30, 1879	Age 74: Dies in Nauvoo.

Sources:

Encyclopedia of Mormonism, https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Smith,_Emma_Hale; Joseph Smith Papers; Biographical Register, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/emma-hale-smith>; Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr., *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, The Man*. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1993; BYU Studies, Book of Mormon Central; bookofmormoncentral.org/ search/google/Emma#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=Emma&gsc.sort; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (NY: Vintage Books, 2005); Lavina Anderson, *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Book, 2001). Gordon A. Madsen, "Joseph Smith's 1826 Trial: A Legal Setting," *BYU Studies*, vol 30, no 2, 91ff. Linda K. Newell, Valeen T. Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (Champaign IL: University of Illinois, 1994).