



Type: Book Chapter

Joseph and Emma's Children/"Small Graves"

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Source: *Praising the Prophet: Joseph Smith and the Restoration in History and Verse*

Published: Orem, UT; Time-Lines Etc., 2005

Pages: 74-76

Joseph and Emma's Children

Joseph and Emma were devoted parents of eleven children, including the adopted Murdock twins. On 6 February 1842, the month before she was called to be the first president of the Relief Society, Emma gave birth to a stillborn son. Only five of their children would grow to adulthood: Julia (who was Joseph Murdock's twin), Joseph III, Frederick, Alexander, and their youngest, David Hyrum, who was born less than five months after the martyrdom. Frederick would die in 1862, and David Hyrum, due to mental instability, would be institutionalized a few years prior to Emma's death.

Julia, Joseph III, and Alexander were present with their stepfather, Lewis C. Bidamon, when Emma died 30 April 1879 at age 74. Her last words were, "Joseph! I am coming!" Years later, in a sermon given in 1903 at Bottineau, North Dakota, Alexander described the circumstances surrounding his mother's death. Emma's nurse had explained to them the meaning of Emma's statement. A few nights before, Emma had told the nurse about a dream in which Joseph had come to her. When he asked her to go with him, she put on her bonnet and shawl. Together they went into a beautiful mansion.⁵¹

As they went through the rooms, they came to the nursery where Emma saw a small child in a cradle. She recognized the infant as her babe Don Carlos, who had died, and sprang forward. Gathering up the child in her arms, she wept with joy over him. Once she regained her composure, Emma asked Joseph, "Where are the rest of my children?" Joseph, who stood by a personage of light, even Jesus Christ, replied, "Emma, be patient, and you shall have all your children."⁵²

Small Graves

In Harmony Joseph
counts heavy losses: firstborn
Alvin buried while Emma
hovers on the brink of death,
precious pages gone,
Spirit withdrawn.

Finally the work resumes.
With Emma ever at his side,
Joseph translates, leads.
The Church is organized.

Saints move to Kirtland
where Thaddeus and Louisa,
twins, hours old, next
are laid to rest among others
sleeping in the cemetery.
Murdock babes fill
Emma's empty arms
until measles, mob and
fatal chill take
little Joseph's life.

Julia alone clings
to her mother.

Surviving Missouri,
Julia and three brothers
gather round as Emma
rocks beloved baby Carlos
in beautiful Nauvoo.

His gift, a fourteen-month
measure of joy.

His passing, the darkest,
most difficult of all.

Within six months
expectation ends.

A sixth small grave
receives a son who
never even cries.

Her sorrow multiplied,
Emma turns to comfort
others, offering relief.

Patiently she worships,
teaches, sings,

and waits

to hold the little ones
she cradles in her dreams.

*But behold, I say unto you, that little children are redeemed from
the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten; ...
(D&C 29:46).*