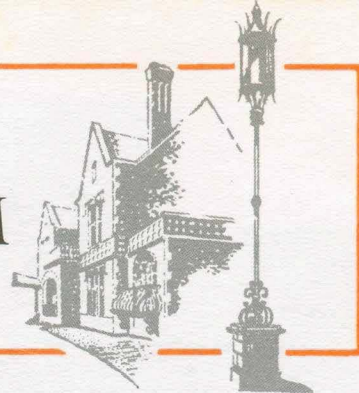


MARY BAKER EDDY MUSEUM  
and Historic Sites



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JOSEPH AND MARY ARMSTRONG

The story of the building of the Original Mother Church edifice in Boston has been an inspiration to thousands, not only in the building of churches in their localities, but in the overcoming of obstacles in their own lives. Joseph Armstrong provided this record, copyrighting his book, *The Mother Church*, on April 14, 1897.

At the time the church was under construction, Joseph Armstrong was a member of The Christian Science Board of Directors. He and other Directors were present at the laying of the cornerstone on May 21, 1894, - a date chosen by Mrs. Eddy. By October the building was considerably behind schedule, so Mr. Armstrong was appointed by Mrs. Eddy to take charge and devote full time to the work. The book relates how every imaginable obstacle was overcome in the period between the laying of the cornerstone on May 21 and December 30 of that year when the first service was held in the church. In the preface to his book, Mr. Armstrong wrote: "It seems desirable to preserve a record of at least a few of the trials, toils, and triumphs of this laborious effort, not only for the benefit of this age, but for the generations to come, which may be able to see more fully than we now can the meaning of this demonstration, and to realize that in the building of this church a Christian endeavor was successful." (*The Mother Church*, p. vii, copyright 1968)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Quotation by permission, The Christian Science Publishing Society

Quarterly News

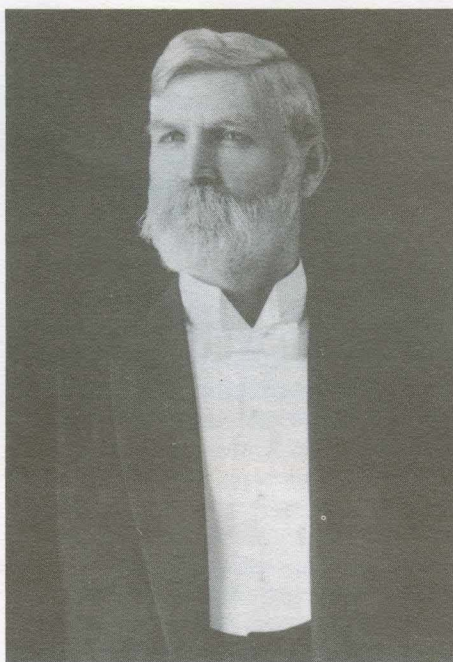
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Joseph Armstrong



Wedding portrait of Joseph and Mary

As scribe of this momentous event he has become identified with the building of the Original Edifice. But his other contributions to the development of the Christian Science movement are also of such significance as to make one desire to know more about him and his wife, Mary.

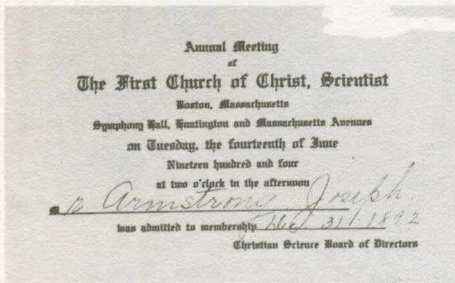
Joseph Armstrong was reared in Carrollton, Illinois attending the public schools and Centre Academy. He was the son of Joshua Wilson Armstrong, a successful business man of that day, who was descended from Capt. John Armstrong. Capt. Armstrong had left Virginia after the Revolutionary War and settled in what is now Harrodsburg, Kentucky.

On November 6, 1878 Joseph married Miss Mary Perrin also of Carrollton. Like his parents, hers came from Kentucky and still earlier from Virginia.

The local newspaper account of the wedding read:

"The ceremony was witnessed by a goodly number of the friends and relatives of the families, and took place at half past 6 o'clock in the evening, when after partaking of the wedding feast sumptuously (sic) and elegantly prepared by Mrs. Perrin, the happy couple repaired to the train at Greenfield when they embarked for West Liberty, Iowa, which place they will make their future home."

Joseph managed the extensive real estate interests left by his father, but on settlement of the latter's estate he moved to Irving, Kansas. There he opened a lumber yard, furniture store and bank. As an entrepreneur his endeavors also embraced real estate and the raising of thoroughbred stock. His general interests included the Irving



Admission card for 1904 Annual Meeting held in Symphony Hall on June 14

Opera House, of which he was half owner, and Freemasonry. On December 25, 1886 he was installed as Worshipful Master of Blue Valley Lodge No. 112 A.F. & A.M. in Irving.

When he became president of the Armstrong Bank in Irving, he realized his greatest ambition. He saw this as an opportunity for substantial financial gain. However, he was later to abandon this ambition for the Cause of Christian Science.

When he opened a new bank building, *The Irving Leader* of February 2, 1888 commented on it:

"J. Armstrong moved into his new bank building, Wednesday, and the handsome cashier, Jas. Neal, has a smile for everyone. It is the most handsomely finished bank in the county and Irving is to be congratulated on having such enterprising men in her midst."

Little did anyone dream then that both the owner of the bank and the

"handsome cashier" would some day become members of The Christian Science Board of Directors. James Neal came into Christian Science through the healing of Mrs. Armstrong and later had class instruction with Joseph Armstrong.

In 1886 Mary Armstrong received a letter from an aunt telling her of the healing by Christian Science of a daughter who had been an invalid for fifteen years. Since Mary was herself faced with an unyielding physical problem, Joseph urged her to visit her aunt to learn more about Christian Science. While visiting this aunt's home she was healed after three treatments by a Christian Science practitioner.

Late in 1886 both the Armstrongs took class instruction from Mrs. Janet T. Colman in Beatrice, Nebraska. They also had Primary instruction from Mrs. Eddy in 1887, and in 1889 they attended a Normal Course at which the opening session was taught by her. In addition, Mr. Armstrong had a third course with Mrs. Eddy in 1888.

After completing the Normal Course the Armstrongs devoted full time to the Cause of Christian Science preaching the truth they had been taught and doing pioneer healing work in the midwest. The Armstrongs practiced in Kansas and Ohio. Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong's cards appeared in *The Christian Science Journal* for the first time in 1888.

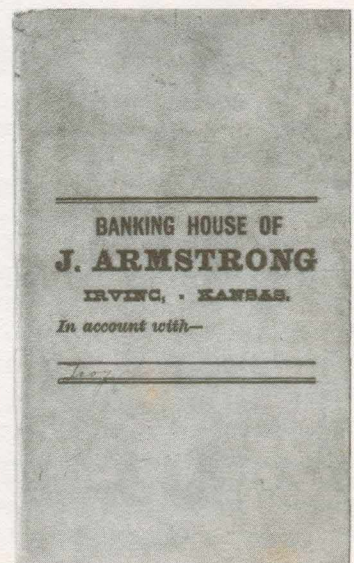
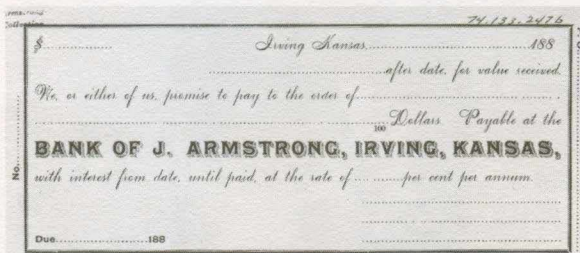
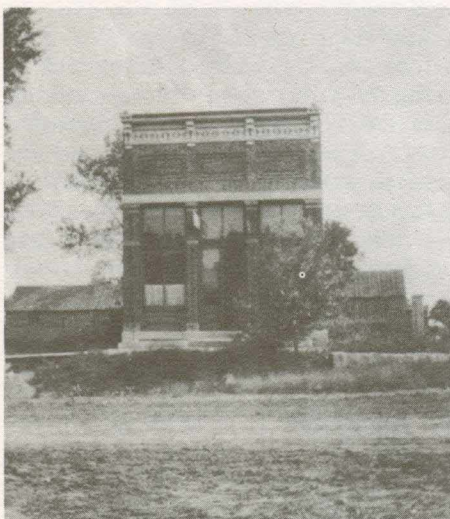
During this period Joseph was maliciously confined to a smallpox pest house in Salina, Kansas for six



Mrs. Janet T. Colman

weeks. His understanding of Christian Science enabled him not only to provide protection against this disease, but to heal several cases of smallpox while there. He gained his release by evidencing perfect health which several doctors confirmed after rigid examination.

In 1892 Joseph Armstrong came to Boston at Mrs. Eddy's request as publisher of *The Christian Science Journal*. Both Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong were accepted as members of The Mother Church on December 31, 1892. Later, on April 16, 1895 they were sent word signed by William B. Johnson that they had been elected "First Members" of



Left to right: J. Armstrong Bank in Irving, Kansas; promissory note form used by the bank; savings book issued by Armstrong Bank.

The Mother Church. The communication to Mr. Armstrong read as follows: "By recommendation of our beloved Teacher and Leader 'Rev. Mary Baker Eddy', you were elected a 'First Member' of 'The First Church of Christ Scientist' in Boston, Mass. at the meeting held Jan. 14th 1895." Mrs. Armstrong's note was identical except that the date of election was February 12, 1895.

They first lived in Roslindale, Massachusetts moving from South Fairview Street near the home of Ira and Flavia Knapp into the house owned by Mrs. Eddy at 175 Poplar Street. In August 1898 they bought a house at 99 Falmouth Street, Boston. (No. 95 became the home of The Christian Science Publishing Society early in 1895, No. 97 being acquired about two years later.) They sold their house to The Mother Church to make way for the Extension and paid rent for their final months of occupancy in 1903. In September of that year they moved to 191 Huntington Avenue. Here Mr. Armstrong taught his last class. Still later they rented a house at 387 Commonwealth Avenue owned by Mrs. Eddy.

At Mrs. Eddy's request Mr. Armstrong was elected to The Christian Science Board of Directors on March 23, 1893 succeeding Capt. Joseph S. Eastaman. Mr. Armstrong was also Treasurer of the Christian Science Hymnal Fund at this time. In 1896 Mrs. Eddy appointed him publisher of all her then known works.

Mary Armstrong served Mrs. Eddy at Pleasant View for a short



Joseph Armstrong at table, his wife, Mary, and their two sons. Photograph taken in Springfield, Ohio about 1890.

time in 1898, and felt she learned a great deal from this experience. In a statement about her instruction in Christian Science, she wrote:

"True to Mrs. Eddy's prophecy to me Christian Science as she taught it to me and the correct understanding I gained from her instructions, has never been dimmed, rather has it been more illumined as I progress in my riper years and larger lessons. It was my great privilege to be a member of Mrs. Eddy's household for a time and to serve her in many capacities, to receive her 'Well done,' for work accomplished, her daily teaching face to face, and her confirmation that I had a

correct understanding of Christian Science."

In June 1918 she also wrote:

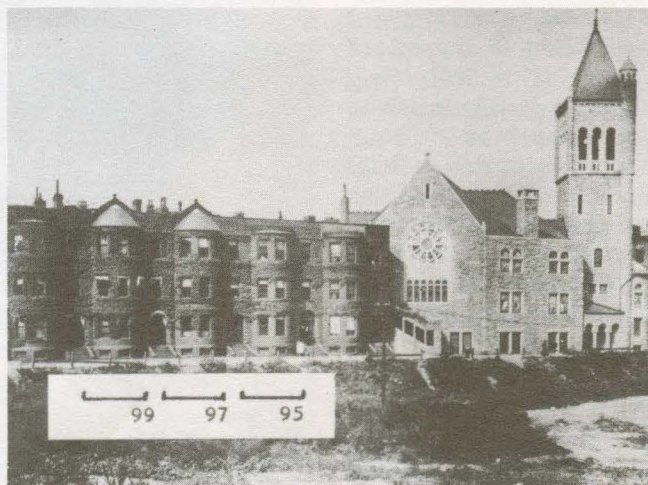
"I bear loyal witness to the steadfastness of Mrs. Eddy in her pursuit of her ideal, Christian Science. I can vouch for, and have proven by my works in healing mankind, the efficacy of Christian Science."

Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong's activities in the Christian Science movement are summarized in their biographies contained in *Pioneers in Christian Science*, a biographical loose-leaf book of early workers known to Mrs. Eddy, published by Longyear Historical Society.

As a pioneer practitioner and



The Armstrongs rented this house at 175 Poplar Street, Roslindale, Massachusetts from Mrs. Eddy.



99 Falmouth Street was owned by the Armstrongs. The Christian Science Publishing Society occupied 95 and 97 Falmouth Street.

teacher, and Director, Joseph Armstrong was well known, but by his book *The Mother Church* he is perhaps best known by us today. The following excerpts from letters to him from early students after publication of his book show their appreciation for the little volume at that time.

On July 1, 1897 Will S. Farlow, C.S.D., brother of Alfred Farlow, first Committee on Publication wrote him:

"We have received and read your new book 'The Mother Church', and consider it a most valuable and interesting work, and wish to thank you for bringing it out."

Mary Brookins, C.S.B., of Minneapolis wrote to him:

"I want to attempt at least to tell you how much good your new book, 'The Mother Church', has done me, and to thank you for writing it....Again and again, in reading of those stern trials of faith and patience and love, and of the unparalleled victories that led up to the final triumphs, these words of Truth were impressed upon me: 'With God all things are possible.' "

Mary H. Philbrick, C.S.D., of Chicago, Illinois wrote to him in July 1897:

"The 'The Mother Church' will forever stand as a monument of *Trustworthiness* and *Obedience*. From my heart I thank you for the many wonderful grand lessons contained in every line and on every page of this priceless volum(e) you have correctly named 'The Mother Church.' "

William P. McKenzie, C.S.B., himself later to become a member of The Christian Science Board of Directors, wrote the following tribute. Excerpts from this letter to Mr. Armstrong dated June 27, 1907 provide a fitting close to this article:

"I feel that I can seldom express to you my appreciation of your enduring faithfulness. A good many years ago Mrs. Eddy wrote to me telling of her appreciation of your work....

"God is rewarding you for all your labor of love.... All causation, all power represents the expression of God's love. In that Love you are comforted and strengthened."

Richard C. Molloy



Certificate of Mary Armstrong from Massachusetts Metaphysical College, February 20, 1888.

**Footnote:**

A short article describing the Armstrong Exhibition at the Museum in 1974 was published in the *Quarterly News*, Spring 1974, Vol. 11, No. 1. Part of this exhibit is still on display. In addition, the current Mary Baker Eddy Portrait Exhibition in the Museum contains a portrait of Mrs. Eddy by Gendron, on loan from Mr. and Mrs. Philip Kalber, which was presented to Joseph Armstrong by Mrs. Eddy. It was given him expressly to hang in his practitioner's office.

Portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong, as well as portraits of Janet T. Colman, James Neal, Capt. Joseph S. Eastaman, Alfred Farlow, Mary Brookins and William P. McKenzie, all mentioned in the text, are on display in the Museum. Reproductions of these portraits are contained in *Pioneers in Christian Science*, published by Longyear Historical Society. Articles have also appeared in the *Quarterly News* on Capt. Eastaman (Winter 1973-74, Vol. 10, No. 4) and on Mr. Farlow (Spring 1970, Vol. 7, No. 1).



Joseph Armstrong on his farm in Walpole, Massachusetts.

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