

THE HISTORY OF
GEORGE WASHINGTON SEVY

Pioneer of about 1850

Submitted by
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Wild Rose Camp

Utah South Center County

GEORGE WASHINGTON SEVY

George Washington Sevy, son of George Sevey and Hannah Maria Libby, was born February 25, 1832 in Leroy, Geneses, New York. He was about five feet eleven inches tall, of medium build, leaning toward the slender side. He had blue eyes, a heavy shock of dark hair, with a rather swarthy complexion and a luxurious beard, rounded just a mite on the end. Many people described him as a handsome man.

He did possess a magnetic personality, and had many friends, being a friend, in return. He was a capable, far-seeing man, financier, organizer and colonizer. In spite of his limited schooling, no one in common conversation could detect that he had not received the normal academic requirements of that time. He wrote a legible hand, and his grammar, as well as his English, was average. He was able to transact business with the great and the small, and was at ease with the echelons of common society. His leadership was of outstanding quality, as was manifest in his years of service to his Church and God, which he rendered at any call from the men in authority.

It is remarkable that a boy, who had received but six months of scholastic training within his whole life, could have acquired so much know-how. This he had in abundance. Some of his vocations, as well as avocations, were the following: making brooms and shoes, farming, raising stock, which included cattle, sheep, pigs, horses and chickens. He was also involved in freighting, mining, peddling, merchandising, land promoting, dairying, saw milling, running harvest machinery, and threshing. He helped with building dams, canals, roads, railroad grades, reservoirs, railroad beds, and he had a magical green thumb and grew anything he planted. He was a master woodsman, and few men could compete with him and his ax.

George W. Sevy was a person of the highest moral character, with no conflict between his natural, rational self and his spiritual, religious or sentimental self. His every act was directed toward the inner circle of his proscribed ethical and religions standards.

When news spread throughout the United States that gold was found in Northern California, George wrote:

"I left my home and my widowed mother to take part in the Gold Rush in California in 1849. Had my job as teamster for a party of gold seekers held out, I would probably be there today, among the discouraged and abandoned miners that fill the state. But the Lord intervened in a way that was hard for me to take at the time. I became very ill, and my buddies decided they could not wait for me to recover, so they left me beside the road. I probably would have died, but a group of Mormons came along, and took me to Salt Lake with them."

{His testimony} "I had heard nothing but unfavorable comments about the Mormons, so I was determined not to tarry among them, but I was left stranded. A good Mormon brother needed some teams taken to Palmyra, where a group of Saints were struggling to begin a new community, so I accepted the job. While I was waiting for a chance to return, I was offered room and board with a good sister who taught me the gospel, by the way she lived it. Under her influence my steeled heart softened, and favorable impressions of the Mormon and their teachings crept in, despite my resolve. Thought you may be sure, I took care not to let anyone know it.

"One night I went with them to a cottage meeting, just to please the good lady I was staying with, and feeling sure my prejudice against the Mormons would never let them get the best of me. I listened to the talks indifferently, passive, and undisturbed. Then one brother arose and took my attention, just as Patriarch Hold took ours a few

Sundays ago by speaking in tongues, a strange language. The peculiar thing about it was that I understood him.

"I knew from the start that he was speaking to me, and telling me that I must not deny the voice trying to speak to me, nor be deaf to what it was saying. The plan of salvation was being shown to me, he said, and a way was being opened for me to accept it, and if I did, I would be the means of taking the gospel to my widowed mother, and would be a savior to her.

"The idea shook me, and left me disturbed. I was not aware of his closing, until the hush and quiet that followed could no longer be ignored. Then I came to with a start. The brother was asking, "Who in the room knew the interpretation of the sermon in tongues?" I had listened, too, and was amazed that no one answered. I was sure they must know what I knew, and that they were keeping still just to see what I would do. When he pointedly asked me if I didn't have the interpretation, I kept still, too, shaking my head vigorously, as much to convince myself that I had not understood, as to deny I had.

"When the meeting ended without my interpretation being given, I left the meeting feeling that every eye was boring me in the back, and that they were all wondering why I had denied something I knew to be true. The uncomfortable remembrance of it kept me awake that night. It tossed me about in my bed as I tried to make up my mind what to do. Not until I had acknowledged the testimony and firm conviction that had come to me, did I find rest. Then I went to sleep so soundly that I did not awaken until the noise of the family assembling for breakfast awoke me.

"I then satisfied my conscience by a confession I had formulated during the night. My heart rejoiced with the spirit of peace therein, for the conviction that my search was over, and that it was something more precious than the gold I had started out to find. A miracle converted me, but it has not taken a miracle to keep me converted. The testimony it left within me is my choicest possession, and it burns ever brighter as the days pass.

"I fulfilled the promise made to me, and became the savior of my mother's soul. She followed me to Utah, with Lem Redd's wagon, hauling her from the Mississippi River to my house in Panguitch. She was living with me when she died, a firm believer in the principles of the gospel, which I had explained to her. She was a happy recipient of the ordinances that insured her salvation in the worlds to come."

What a gloriously, beautiful testimony. From that day on, George made a careful, prayerful study of the Mormon teachings, and was baptized May 3, 1853 by Stepham Markham. George was a man of outstanding leadership. He was not a stranger to hard work, and was willing to engage in any assignment that was given to him.

During the winter of 1852-53 George lived in the new settlement of Palmyra. In 1853 they built an adobe fort. Its walls were two feet thick and 20 feet high. Homes were built inside with a port hole in each compartment. A well in the center provided water. The only entrance was a gate four feet thick and sixteen feet high. The following families spent their first there:

William Pace, John Lowe Butler, Isaac Brockbank, H.B.M. Jolley, James Youd, Wilson D. Pace, Harvey A. Pace, William F. Pace, Cyrus Snell, Mrs. Elizabeth McKinley, Orrawell Simons, James B. Hawks, John W. Mott, Amos Stiles, John H. Redd, Lemuel H. Redd, Mathew Caldwell, George W. Sevy, Lemmion Butler, Zebedee Coltrin and Philo Allen.

It wasn't long before George was attending Saturday night dances in their one-room schoolhouse, dancing to the music of a violin and sometimes a harmonica. He would dance the Schottische, Virginia Reel, and Quadrille with the pretty girls in their homespun dresses. It was there that he met and courted the beautiful, brown eyed Phoebe Malinda Butler, a daughter of

John Lowe Butler and Caroline Skeen. They were married December 5, 1854, and began life humbly and bravely, facing the future on an even keel with the other young people of the time.

The first winter they lived within the walls of the old fort. Their first home was a one room cabin with a large fireplace, where cooking was done on the hearth in either a Dutch-oven, an iron frying pan, or a kettle, which was suspended by a hook over the fire. Phoebe carded and spun wool and wove cloth for their clothing, while George made their shoes, when they had any. They worked hard to build a home and get established in Spanish Fork. Phoebe had food and a straw bed as good as anyone.

This frontier settlement of Spanish Fork was faced with bringing the mountain streams onto the sage flats and converting them into their fields and orchards. Along with this they had to cope with unfriendly Indians, who resented the encroaching whites. It was the beginning of a fruitful life for this young couple. For a time they lived on the river, south of Spanish Fork. They built a footbridge across the river, and nailed standards to the bridge. They wove willows to keep the children from falling into the river. They had to haul firewood from the hills, and building materials from hastily built water-powered sawmills, and provide their own food and clothing.

In 1861 George was called on a mission to New Harmony and was one of the first settlers there. The town was built about four miles west of the old Fort Harmony in Washington County. Their outfit was a large schooner wagon, the same as those used crossing the plains. It was drawn by two yoke of cattle, three oxen and a cow. They led another cow behind the wagon. There were several wagons in the company.

When they reached the fort, it was occupied by John D. Lee and family, who took them in to rest for the night. The next morning they moved on to the new town site, where a few buildings were already standing. The Sevys made camp on the creek near the Jim Pace family, living in a tent some of the time. They later built a log cabin, which had a dirt floor, dirt roof, a quilt hung at the door and factory (a homespun muslin fabric) at the windows.

George and his wife were very industrious. They made adobes and built a three-room house. It was not long before they had acquired a few sheep and cows. Feed was plentiful, and livestock did well. The following year, 1862, he cleared land and planted a garden. They produced most of what they had. A day for these people was from daylight to dark.

In 1865 George went to Pioche, Patison and Ely, Nevada with produce to sell, which he had raised in his gardens and on his farm. A Mr. Patison at the Patison Mining camp was in the mercantile business, and induced George to set up a store in New Harmony. He would furnish the stock and take livestock and produce for his pay. It was the first store in the locality, and gave people a chance to exchange produce for merchandise.

George also built a water-powered sawmill at New Harmony with an "up and down" saw. He and his boys went into Pine Valley Mountains where they hauled out timber with ox teams. This was a great help to the citizens of New Harmony as they now could get a good grade of lumber to build and furnish their homes.

At the close of the year 1865 there were twenty-five families and two hundred twenty-five souls in New Harmony. In crops they had 34 acres of wheat, 98 of corn, 22 of potatoes and 8 of cane. On August 20, 1867 New Harmony Ward was organized by President Erastus Snow with Willis D. Pace as Bishop, Henry Bryant Manning Jolley as first counselor, George W. Sevy as second counselor, and Samuel Worthen as clerk of the ward.

Phoebe worked in the Relief Society during the years she lived in New Harmony. The circumstances in which they lived were humble. Cornmeal mush and corn bread were the staple foods, but by her industry conditions improved, and soon fresh vegetables, fruits and milk were available. Their home was made more comfortable, and here they lived a happy life.

On August 29, 1868 George entered into his first plural marriage by taking as his second wife Margaret Nebraska Imlay, a daughter of James Havens Imlay and Anna Eliza Coward.

Two and a half years later he took his two wives and his family to re-settle Panguitch in answer to a call from President Brigham Young, asking George to take charge of the resettling there. So George had a notice printed in the Deseret News:

"All those who wish to go with me to
resettle Panguitch Valley, will meet
me at Red Creek on the 4th day of
March 1871, and we will go over the
Mountain, in company to settle that Country.
Signed, George W. Sevy"

Red Creek is now known as Paragonah. From there over rough, uncharted roads they drove their ox teams into the Virgin Valley, and by lots of hard work and wise planning, utilized the cold mountain streams and transformed the sage flats into farms and ranches for raising cattle and sheep.

The crops were not very large the first year. After the settlement was abandoned due to hostile Indians, there was concern to make the wheat hold out and everyone get their share.

Phoebe Sevy boiled the wheat they had brought from New Harmony, and people came to her for what they needed. In a short time a cooperative store was built and organized with George W. Sevy as President, and M.M. Steele as Secretary. George Sevy and James Imlay built sawmills about ten miles from town on Panguitch Creek.

Upon the arrival of the second company in 1871, a ward of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized with George W. Sevy as bishop and James Henry and Meltiar Hatch as counselors.

Within two years the community had grown until nearly 200 families had established homes there. George presided as Bishop for nine years, and when the Panguitch Stake was organized in April 1877, he was chosen first counselor to the Stake president, James Henrie, while at the same time he continued in his position as Bishop.

Many industries were started: a boot and shoe shop, harness shop, a printing press, shingle mill, pottery plant, mercantile establishments and others. The community boasted of many tradesmen, carpenters, masons, fishermen, musicians, seamstresses and blacksmiths.

A meetinghouse was erected of brick. The history of Panguitch states that George W. Sevy was one of the outstanding characters of the pioneer days of that city. He owned and operated a dairy, making butter and cheese, which they freighted with the lumber to the mining camps in Nevada. He went with others in 1875 to Potato Valley and assisted in settling what is now the flourishing town of Escalante.

On December 18, 1877 George married a second plural wife, Martha Ann Thomas, of Pine Valley, Utah, a daughter of John Pledger Thomas and Mahala Mathews. They were married in St. George. During the next year he participated in the expedition to San Juan county, in Southeastern Utah, and helped open that country for settlement by building a raft to cross the Colorado River at the celebrated "Hole in the Rock". He was one of four men who, in December of 1878, explored that country for a wagon road from the crossing of the Colorado to the site of the city of Bluff on the San Juan River.

In 1885 after much consideration, George decided to go to Mexico, taking with him his plural wives. He wanted to take Phoebe, and tried to get her to see how important it was to have her with him. But Phoebe reminded him that it would be necessary for someone to stay in Panguitch and look after their interests there. Since she was older and her children were beginning to marry and settle there, she wanted to remain near them. She said she had already helped to settle and colonize three different localities, and now felt that she should be the one to

keep up the properties they had in Panguitch. So it was now Phoebe's responsibility, with the help of her family, to carry on and take care of the property, which consisted of a farm, livestock, cattle, horses and sheep, and a ranch at Panguitch Lake as well as caring for her younger children.

George moved to Mexico with his plural wives to escape persecution for these polygamous marriages. He helped to build Colonia Juarez, and was its first bishop, presiding for 12 years. He helped with the building of the telegraph line. He established a tannery at Juarez, which afterward consolidated with another and became the General Leather Goods Company. He was financially interested in most of the industries started in the colonies, including mining. He helped layout and build roads into the Sierra Madre Mountains and locate the towns, Chorales and Pacheco.

George Sevy lived his life on the frontier exploring and colonizing. Maturity brought him a wealth of experiences coupled with rare judgements that made of him a valuable man and a key figure in the settling of the colonies in Mexico. His wise, calm judgement was always a great factor in the troublesome times of the early days. He was a successful business man, a long term and much loved Bishop in the wards, a father of a large, wonderful family, a kind father and neighbor, and always a friend to those in need.

His most precious gifts were his children. He loved them and their laughter and questions. Their hour in the evening was one of happiness and rest. They would gather around his chair and sing their favorite songs. One could truly see that there was love in this home; love for each other, and love for all whom wished to share it.

But love can bring heartache and pain as well as happiness. George felt this pain when he heard of the death of his beloved first wife, Phoebe. She had contracted cholera morus, a particularly bad type of dysentery, and passed away rather suddenly. It was impossible for George to make the long journey back to Panguitch before her burial, so she was laid away without his having seen her for several years. This happened on August 14, 1892.

George considered himself a wealthy man; wealthy in experiences few men could claim. Wealthy in the blessings the Lord had given him. Wealthy in his family, love and satisfaction of a life well lived and a job well done. Always by his side, through joy and sorrow, had his been loving companions. There had been Phoebe, the girl of his youth, who had helped him to begin life in the vast Utah wilderness, matching his own pioneer spirit in work and love. Her work was done now, and her reward won. She rested peacefully back in the quiet, green valley of the Rocky Mountains. He was happy for her, but he knew he would feel a pain whenever he thought of her and realized all over again that she would no longer be there, waiting, should he feel the need of her advice or her presence.

He had Martha Ann and Maggie to help him, and his thoughts hurried to his second wife, Maggie. She was ill, and he worried about her. Dear God, don't let anything happen to these two, dear women who had sacrificed so much to be by his side. They had left their families in Utah to come to this distant outpost to work and toil and rear children for him. It had not been easy for them, but they were always ready to do their share.

Maggie kept up the farm for him, and Martha kept his home in town in good running order, and was always there when he needed encouragement and cheering up. They did their share in building up Colonia Juarez.

Maggie had another child, a boy, and although she was happy with her new baby, her health was failing, and she was not able to work as she had done. The cause of her illness was grave, and it was apparent that something would have to be done if at all possible. Soon she was in a critical state, and it was known for certain that she was suffering from cancer. There were no doctors in Mexico that could give her aid. George knew a doctor in Utah by the name of Blackburn that possibly might help. He prepared the wagon as comfortably as he could, as

Maggie would have to ride in it most of the way. They took the baby with them, and George made the miles count as best as he could.

They were in Wayne County a few miles from their destination when Maggie's frail body could no longer stand the strain, and she passed away. It was a sad, tired husband that pulled into Panguitch with his precious cargo, to be laid to rest by his first wife, Phoebe, who had died five years previous.

On his return to Mexico he moved Martha Ann out to the farm, for now she would have to take care of the chores. He enlarged their house to accommodate all the family. Martha would have three more children to care for, but he knew she could manage the job like an expert, and so she did.

George tried to get busy with new accomplishments, but he found he tired very easy. He had frequent spells of illness and had to turn the jobs of driving his teams over to his son. His heart was failing, and he was suffering terribly with sugar diabetes. It was disheartening to see him so filled with desire to work and build, and who had made such great strides in life, lying there so tired and still. The strength of his body was being steadily drawn from him. He called his family together and talked to each one of them about the things that were most dear to him. It had been his greatest pleasure to bear his testimony of the gospel, and would in his good-natured way conclude, "It took a miracle to convert me, but it hasn't taken others to keep me converted."

On June 22, 1902, after a very full and complete life, he passed away at his home in Colonia Juarez. He was buried there the next day. Years later Martha Ann was laid by his side, thus closing the book of life on George Washington Sevy. He was married three times and had thirty children.

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